PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGY FOR PEACE IN ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NIGERIA STATE

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Abstract
Nigeria like other nations has not been spared from the problem of ethnic conflict. These ethnic conflicts are characterized by genocidal attacks, bombing, maiming and killings of several persons, loss of business investments, and properties worth several billions of Naira. The situation is worsened by the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians. The challenge of managing Nigeria's ethnic crisis has not been an easy task. However, several efforts such as deployment of huge security operatives, peaceful dialogue amongst religious groups and setting up of probe panels have been made to manage the perennial conflict but with little or no positive solution. Hence, this paper attempt to determine the problems associated with ethnic conflict with the aim to proffer psychological strategies that will bring about peace in Nigeria.
**Keywords: Psychological Strategy, Peace, and Ethnic Conflict**

Introduction

Ethnic crisis is one of the difficult and perhaps the most complex problem facing Nigeria and most countries in the world, whether developed or developing countries. Imhonopi and Urim (2012), posit that the growing number of violent crimes, ethnic and religious killings, kidnapping, communal clashes, politically motivated violence, militancy, suicide bombing and banditry have increasingly become common phenomenon in the Nigerian society. Unfortunately the trend towards ethnic conflict is continuing unabated in the country. Ethnic-religious conflict tends to be an inherent part of life today (Galtung, 1996; Kriesberg, 2006; Lederach, 2003). This ethnic tension has the potential for creative and constructive initiatives, on one hand, or destructive and harmful consequences on the other. Babangida (2002), contends that consequences of ethnic

conflicts consist of the following; "waste of enormous human and material resources in ethnically and religiously inspired violent encounters, clashes and even battles, threats to security of lives and properties, the heightening of the fragility of the economy and political process". Francis (2006), also argued that contested identities (along ethnic and religious fault-lines), have dominated the literature on the analysis of conflict and have come to represent the stereotypical images of Africa. Identity constitutes, but is not limited to, the following; race, ethnicity, religion, language, nationalism and cultural/common heritage. Religious fundamentalism, political ethnicity, and virulent nationalism have led to the emergence of assertive identity politics with the capacity to mobilize public support for its cause... as well as the capacity to instigate violent conflicts as witnessed in Nigeria today (Francis, 2006).

In the world today, the continuation of civil conflict, inter-ethnic religious tensions and renewed political violence has posed great challenges to national peace and development (Harbom & Wallensteen, 2007). This is due to the fact that politicians and policymakers largely overlook the psychosocial dimensions of peace building (Bar-Tal, 2007). In some regards this is not surprising, because positive peace envisions human and community flourishing through access to economic development, education, health, and so on. Therefore, comprehensive peace initiatives as a social energy of conflict transformation begin both to reweave the torn social fabric in communities and to redefine how individuals and communities interact (Ajdukovic, 2004; Lederach, 2005).

According to Egwu (2001), the primordial inclination of most religious and ethnic groups toward conflict and the persistent upsurge of violent ethnic-religious militias and warlords, who pledges allegiance to the values and beliefs of certain dominant
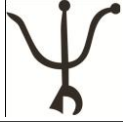
religious and ethnic groups, have aggravated the scale of insecurity, and widened its scope in different dimensions. The prevailing security situation, characterised by ritual killings, cultism, insurgency, militancy, suicide bombings, religious killings, assassinations, drug trafficking, vandalism of oil installation, ethnic crisis, destruction of lives and properties, armed robbery and a host of other crimes, has destroyed the very foundation of national peace and integration. It has also created a situation of constant panic, fear, apprehension, and anxiety in the minds of Nigerians. The incessant violent attacks and unabated religious upheavals have resulted to wanton damage of critical infrastructures without which development is not guaranteed. Although the magnitude and severity of ethnic and religious crisis may differ from place to place, it poses serious challenges to human existence and business activities of individuals, households, and communities in Nigeria. Empirical research has found negative associations between ethnic and religious crisis and a range of outcomes including economic, health, educational, social, and psychological outcomes (Egwu, 2001; Adebayo, 2006; Imhonopi & Urim, 2012).

Moreover, Religion is ranked next to ethnicity in Nigeria, and is usually classified into three – Christian, Muslim and Traditional. The least politically active in this classification is the traditional religion(s); numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses. In effect, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict in Nigeria (Lewis & Bratton, 2000). It is difficult to define with precision and objectivity because it is emotion-laden (Egwu, 2011). Ogban-
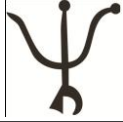
iyam (2005) maintained that religion is one of the phenomena that are often misunderstood in the analysis of interpersonal activities, especially violent conflicts in Nigeria. In many instances, religious riots provide grounds for economic, political, opportunity for looting, intimidation, and controlling the affairs of co-religionists and non-co-religionists and even that of the hated co-religionists. Threats are purportedly issued to one religious sect when adherents of another religious sect occupy the advantageous position within the social production process. When this happens, conflicts and violence engenders.

More so, the relationship between ethnic conflict and strategy for peace promotes peace building through the development of constructive relationships (Christie, 2001). Structural ethnic conflict transformation also addresses relationships between and among social groups and institutions, such as the state or multinational blending institutions, to advance equitable political, economic and social systems (Christie, 2006; Staub, 2006). Rebuilding relationships must be fostered at the same level the grievance occurred (Martín-Baró, 1994). In deeply divided societies, conflict transformation must be addressed through a range of responses at multiple levels of the social ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Lederach, 1997). National-level processes may not sufficiently address inter-personal and communal abuses inflicted during collective violence and genocide (Staub, 1999). In this light, psychologists may understand peace strategy as a means of preventing renewed violence and ethnic-religious conflict (Staub, 1999).

Review of Related Literatures

Ethnic Conflict

The word "conflict" is derived from the Latin word *confligere*, meaning to "strike together." Conflict is any form of confrontation between two or more parties resulting

from 'a situation where (these) two or more interdependent groups or systems of action have incompatible goals (Diller, 1997)." Two things could be taken from these simple definitions. The first is that conflict emanates from (social) relationships. The conflicting groups must reside in close proximity whether physically or psychologically. Conflict also means contradiction arising from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations, beliefs, perceptions and tendencies. Further, conflict take on a wide variety of forms and have been classified based on the intensity or scale of violence, structural and character of parties in conflict (such as class, ethnic group, religious group, racial group, and so on) and manifesting a distinct spatial character (such as national, regional, inter-state or international). However, non-violent conflict has the potential to become violent if the regulatory mechanism is ineffective. Although, conflict is a normal, natural and an inevitable phenomenon in any interactive situation of human life, contradictions exists at all levels of the society – intra – psychic/personal, interpersonal, intra – groups, inter – group, institution, intra – national and international. Conflict is not necessarily negative in itself. It is often a by – product of social change and may lead to constructive transformation.

Ethnic conflict is a conflict that is inspired by ethnic and religious factors. The word ethnic is conceptualized as those groups of people that share a common and distinctive feature of language, heritage and religion. This include the major ethnic groups such as the Hausa, Fulani,Yoruba, Igbos etc and also the minority ethnic groups such as the Atyab, Bajju,Gwari, Jaba, Kaninkon etc. while religion in this context are the three constitutionally recognized religion in the country i.e. Islam, Christianity and the

traditional religions. On the other hand, conflict according to the Heidelberg institute for international conflict research (HIIK 2005), is the "clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organization) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases". According to UNEP (2006), ethno religious conflicts have a propensity of multifaceted impact on people's properties both in the short and long-term. Such destruction is seen manifestly in the quality of life as well as affecting the basic human rights of the people and their social existence.

However, these ethnic conflagrations have severally drawn the country to the precipice of disaster. It has engendered hug however. This is the high level of inter-ethnic and inter-religious vendetta in the country, to the point that it seems that Nigeria is now exhibiting the symptom of a collapsing state, whose members are perpetually at war with one another (Imobighe 2003). Thus this ethnic war is increasingly societal and involves non-state actors. And this raises profound psychological issues and questions of how to handle the menace and build peace not only through top-down approaches but also through efforts to transform and repair societal relationships (Kelman, 1997).

Peace

Peace is seen as the absence of war and violence in a mutually beneficial, harmonious relationship among relevant parties, including within an individual or between individuals, groups, or countries. This definition of peace is assumed to have two separate dimensions (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, 2006, 2010). On the first dimension, war, violence, and strife are at one end (war is a state of open and declared armed combat between entities such as states or nations) and at the other end are settlements, agreements, and common understandings that end or avert hostilities and violence. On
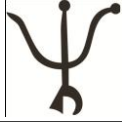
this dimension, if war and violence is absent, then peace is assumed to exist. On the second dimension, discordant, hostile interaction aimed at dominance and differential benefit (i.e., winners and losers) and characterized by social injustice is at one end, and mutually beneficial, harmonious interaction aimed at achieving mutual goals and characterized by social justice is at the other end. On this dimension, if the relationship is characterized by positive relationships, mutual benefit, and justice, then peace is assumed to exist. Inherent in this definition is that Peace is a relationship variable, not a trait. Peace exists among individuals, groups, and nations; it is not a trait or a predisposition. While some people, groups, and nations may more naturally seek peace than others, and it is easier for some people, groups, and nations to maintain peace than others, peace is something that occurs *between* characteristics, people, groups, and nations; peace is not a characteristic or disposition *within* a person, group, and nation. As a relationship, peace cannot be maintained by separation, isolation, and building barriers between conflicting parties, all of which may temporarily reduce violence, though establishing a "cold" war, but will not establish the relationships and cooperation required for long-term peace (Johnson &Johnson, 2006, 2010).

Peace and Ethnic Conflict

The problems of building peace in multi-ethnic countries have been given a prominent focus in academic writings, theorising and development practice. The more theories we have, the closer we seem to be moving to a formidable peace building strategy, but the more the world misses it in practice. The search for a formidable strategy and practice for building peace has provoked a multi-disciplinary input which incorporates

education in the search for sustainable peace as asserted by the United Nations, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The research indicated a need for intensified efforts to build the nation by first restoring peace in all warring religious communities and the stoppage of spill-over effects that violence has on other national matters as well as communities within the nation.

Nigeria not only has cohesion problems, it also has the problems of poverty, a high illiteracy rate and inequity in the distribution of educational infrastructure amongst its constituent ethnic groups. For example, the Situation and Policy Analysis (1993) document reports a lack of access to adult education programs for many adults in as many as 46% of the communities sampled, while the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (FME 1999) data showed that there was no reduction of illiteracy level but a deterioration instead from the initial 57% to 49% and a disparity in the literacy rate between the southern and northern regions of Nigeria (55% and 60% for south-west and southeast respectively, while the north-east and north-west record 21–22% for female and 40–42% for male) (Federal Ministry of Education 2003). In the same vein, the Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF (Federal Government of Nigeria 2001) reports that for women the literacy rate declined from 44% to 41%. The high prevalence of illiteracy has definite implications for the peace building efforts of any nation, and the high prevalence of illiteracy is linked to the ethnic-religious conflict among Nigerian's communities.
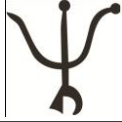
Psychological Strategy for Peace
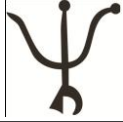
In order to ensure lasting peace, security and stability in Nigeria, the following needs to be done:

- **Effective Cooperation:** At the national level, the developmental of harmonious peaceful relations among ethnic nationality will require effective cooperation in dealing with such issues as climate change, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, pandemics of contagious diseases, economic development, failed states, and so on. Much research has been done on the conditions which give rise to successful cooperation and to its effects (Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Deutsch, 2006, 2011).

- **Human Needs and Emotions:** Neither effective cooperation, constructive conflict resolution, nor social justice is likely when basic human needs are unsatisfied. Maslow (1954) has identified the basic human needs as: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization. Frustration of these needs leads to diverse emotional consequences such as apathy, fear, depression, humiliation, rage, and anger. These emotions are not conducive to effective cooperation, constructive conflict resolution, or any other psychological component of a harmonious, sustainable peace. The view that the frustration of one's needs is purposeful and unjust gives rise to intense feelings of humiliation which Lindner (2006) has described as the "nuclear bomb of emotions".

- **Creative Problem Solving:** Betty Reardon, a noted peace educator, once said, "The failure to achieve peace is in essence a failure of imagination" (personal communication). The freedom and ability to imagine new possibilities as well as the capacity to select judiciously from these possibilities what is novel, interesting, and valuable (Simon, 2001) are central to creative problem-solving. The conditions which foster the freedom and ability to create novel and valuable solutions not only are conditions in the problem-solver (individual or group), but also are conditions in the social context, which affects the problem-solver. Creative problem solving is necessary to overcome the obstacles which block effective cooperation and the impasses which hinder constructive conflict resolution.

- **Persuasion and Dialogue:** As Ledgerwood et al., (2006), have pointed out: "Persuasion is distinct from coercion in that persuasion is influence designed to change people's minds, whereas coercion involves influence designed to change people's behaviours (with little regard for whether they have actually changed their minds)." Lasting change is more likely to result from persuasion than coercion. Persuasion involves communication by a source of a message, through a medium, designed to reach and influence a recipient. Whether the recipient will be persuaded by the message is a function of the characteristics of each of the foregoing elements as well as the characteristics of the relationship between the source and the recipient. Sustainable, harmonious peaceful relations require the mutual ability to persuade one another. Without this ability, a convergence of values, information, and actions as well as mutual satisfaction of needs is not likely to occur. Dialogue, unlike persuasion, is not unilateral. It is a mutual

process in which the interaction parties openly communicate and actively listen to one another with mutual respect and a feeling of mutual equality. Each communicates what is important and true for her without derogating what is true and important for others. They seek to learn together and to find common meaning by exploring the assumptions underlying their individual and collective beliefs. Dialogue is a collaborative and creative process in which the participants are open to change as they seek common ground and mutual understanding.
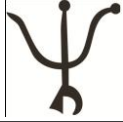
▪ **Reconciliation:** After destructive conflicts in which the conflicting parties have inflicted grievous harm (humiliation, destruction of property, torture, assault, rape, murder) on one another, the conflicting parties may still have to live and work together in the same communities. This is often the case in civil wars, ethnic and religious conflicts, gang wars and even family disputes that have taken a destructive course. After bitter destructive conflict, it can be expected that reconciliation will be achieved, if at all, after a slow process with many setbacks as well as advances. The continuous and persistent help and encouragement of powerful and respected third parties is often necessary to keep the reconciliation process moving forward and to prevent its derailment by extremists, misunderstandings or harmful actions by either of the conflicting parties. The help and encouragement must be multifaceted. It must deal, not only with the social psychological issues addressed, but also, justly, with such institutions as the economic, political, legal, educational, health care and security, whose effective functioning are necessary for a sustained reconciliation.

- **Distributive bargaining:** A form of competitive, win-lose negotiation, often employed in business interactions, where parties try to unilaterally maximize their outcomes through employing various competitive tactics (Walton & McKersie, 1991; Lewicki et al., 2004). This type of bargaining can play a constructive role in conflict resolution when it takes place in a generally cooperative context where the rules of engagement are clear and followed and there are sufficient consequences for rule-violations (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

- **Mediation**: Third party facilitation of an integrative negotiation process where the decision-making power over agreement remains with the disputants. It can take many forms, from more formal to informal, involving neutral outsiders or well-known insiders as mediators, and take place over one meeting or over multiple sessions (Kressel, 2006; Moore, 1996).

- **Arbitration:** Similar to mediation, however typically the arbitrator becomes the final decision-maker regarding agreements. There are also variations where disputants begin with a process of formal mediation but may move into arbitration if they fail to come to an agreement by themselves.

Theoretical Framework

Drive Theory

Drive theory is based on the principle that organisms are born with certain psychological needs and that a negative state of tension is created when these needs are not satisfied. When a need is satisfied, drive is reduced and the organism returns to a state of homeostasis and relaxation. According to the theory, drive tends to increase

over time and operates on a feedback control system, much like a thermostat. The theories also suggest that conflict is created by external conditions that arouse the motive to harm others. This theory suggests that conflict is a predictable reaction to a defined stimulus, the defined stimuli being frustration. As the level of drive increases, the individual is motivated to find ways in which behaviours can be acted that reduce the drive. It is reactive towards violence rather than an innate instinct. And scholars like Le Bon, (1895), Freud, (1921), Bion, (1961) & Turquet, (1975) are of the opinion that depth of this drive usually resuscitates regressive potential that are capable of causing intra-and-inter-group conflict. While Kernberg, (1980) on the other hand, who attempted to preserve the drive model theory by incorporating object relations concepts into what he considered his own Freudian model, noted the prevalence in groups of "primitive," that is developmentally early, defence mechanisms such as splitting, denial, projective identification, idealization and omnipotence. Consistent with Freud's depiction of the role of the leader in mobs, describes how the group employs these defence mechanisms as a protection against intragroup conflict, for instance, by blindly following an idealized leader who mobilizes the group's shared projection of the conflict impulse onto external enemies. In Kernberg's idea, small groups are able to contain the conflict, in part because eye-to-eye contact and personal acquaintance reduces hostility. All this is to say that according to drive theory, one way or another, conflict must be contended with. As noted by Kernberg, structured groups are generally less vulnerable to regression–induced intragroup conflict than their unstructured counterparts.

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To apply this widely shared principle to ethnic conflict in Nigeria, which according to Ibrahim (2000), ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are linked to citizenship within the context of identity, which is rooted in the politics of inclusion or exclusion: These are tied to claims and counter-claims over identity as a basis for determining who is excluded or included from decision making as well as access to opportunities under the 'we' versus 'them' cliché (Kwaja, 2008). In the sense, durable peace in which the mutual coexistence of all religious and ethnic groups can only take place when democracy and mental reformation are achieved across ethnic groups (Hegre, et.al, 2001).

For example, Bar-On (2006) and Maoz (2011), evaluate several models of reconciliation-aimed contact interventions in the acute, asymmetrical conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. While their formulations are not psychoanalytic, their findings demonstrate that unregulated confrontation on one hand and total avoidance of painful disagreements on the other, are of limited utility. The former tends to trigger destructive intergroup interactions; the latter disappoints participants and is often seen as intentionally perpetuating the existing asymmetrical intergroup power relations. Tentative findings indicate that the most constructive method aim to address the weaknesses of both of these approaches. By having participants tell their own personal stories relevant to the conflict situation, this model provides for semi-structured intergroup interactions, where aggressive impulses are embedded in a context of personal loss and other, non-aggressive affects, and expressed symbolically and thus less directly to members of the other group. Research identified the essential elements of the "good enough" story, but the overall method has been demonstrated to be the most consistent in generating intergroup empathy and understanding. Opportunities for a peaceful sublimation of aggression, cooperative intergroup efforts should also
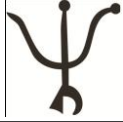
promote processes associated with such neurotic-to-healthy defence mechanisms such as isolation, displacement, intellectualization and repression. At the same time, they should discourage the employment of developmental early defences such as denial, splitting and projective identification (Freud, 1914; Lazar & Erlich, 1996).

Discussion

The outcome of the literatures reviewed indicated that ethnic conflict is still on the rampage in Nigeria, this may be because of unemployment, poverty, nepotism, Machiavellian leadership style and politics of winners take all that is usually exhibited by our political leaders today. This brought about the ongoing agitation and division across ethnic group in our society, where an Hausa man does not trust an Igbo man nor do Yoruba believe in Hausa. Hence, the division, distrust and conflict continue without lasting solution to the menace bewildering our society which at times causes incessant killing of the innocent masses due to the quest of one ethnic group trying to outsmart and defend their ethnic identity and ideology over another and this breed the unwholesome society we are witnessing in Nigeria today. And this is in line with Freud's idea leader in mobs, which describes how the group employs these defence mechanisms as a protection against intragroup conflict, for instance, by blindly following an idealized leader who mobilizes the group's shared projection of the conflict impulse onto perceived external enemies. However, Nigerian state has become increasingly engaged in the management of ethnic and religious conflicts through the use of maximum

retaliatory measure to respond to the conflict, though the measures taken shows that psychological principle is still lacking for lasting peace in Nigeria.
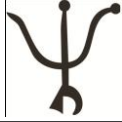
Suggestion

Ethnic conflicts end by either the defeat of one party involved in such a conflict or by an intervention by a third party to bring the conflict to an end. However, initiation of peace building at the national or local level, regardless of its origins, is very necessary in integrating the efforts of diverse conflicting actors. Also, identifying the true 'movers' and 'shakers' of the group and making them feel very important which is central to the peace process and also allowing them to pour out their mind on how they feel by using an interactive approach in appealing to parties. More so, in order to achieve peace in the midst of ethnic religious conflict, the mediators/negotiators must win the confidence of the conflicting parties by being impartial, neutral and reliable. They must also have their consent or agreement before peace can be made. Thus, as Young (1967) observed that trustworthiness, prestige, firmness, authority, independence, knowledge of vital information and flexibility should be considered as necessary ingredients of peace making in time of conflict situation wherever necessary in order to move negotiations forward.

Conclusion

Ethnic tension has the potential for creative and constructive tendencies, on one hand, or destructive and harmful consequences on the other. Facing conditions of social division, scarce economic resources and national reconstruction, former adversaries must work to achieve change in short-term, demanding time frames. At the same time, beyond the walls of national ministries and parliaments, other engaged actors respond
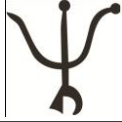
to daily challenges. Amid open conflict and in the aftermath of violence, psychological peace strategies should grow creatively at the local level in order for people to be aware that violence is not the only way to solve crisis but using other means as dialogue and respect for each other despite the reservations one might have.

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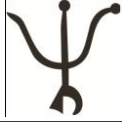
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