INTER-GROUP CONFLICTS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS: A REVIEW OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN THE NIGER DELTA CRISES.

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Abstract.

Intergroup conflict has been a major feature of the Nigerian polity since her independence. Her multi-ethnic composition, diversity of cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, unequal endowments with natural resources as well as perceived unfair allocation of state's resources, among her over 250 constituent ethnic groups, are some of the factors that fuel ethnic rivalry which snowballed into many violent conflicts in the past and even in the present time. This paper, using partly a descriptive design, examines one of such ethnic conflicts as experienced in the country and pays particular attention to the traditional approach adopted in its resolution after the failure of military force to contain the violence by the authorities. This effort brought some peace to the troubled region. This approach was examined in the light of Fraser and Novelli et al model which is anchored on the 4Rs i.e, removal of symbolic or cultural domination, redistribution, representation and reconciliation. The study reviewed literature on intergroup conflicts and measured the preference of participants on methods of resolving an intergroup conflict in

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an experimental situation. A total of 60 subjects assigned into three groups participated in the research. Result indicates that more participants showed preference for traditional methods in the search for peace. Participants did not differ significantly based on their ethnic groups, on the belief in violent demonstration as an appropriate reaction to perceived social injustice. Result, however, also revealed that individuals from the ethnic group of the leader would likely support the use of non-traditional method more than those who do not have any ethnic connection with the leader. The study discussed how these nontraditional methods serve the purpose of system justification including the inherent flaws and the prospects of the traditional methods in peace building in a volatile area.

Keyword: conflict, traditional method, peace, ethnicity.

Introduction

The Niger Delta region, also called the South-South geo-political zone is one of the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It is made up of six states, Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, and Edo. The region consists of ethnic groups that are sometimes called minorities, the other dominant groups in Nigeria are three and includes Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. The Niger-Delta region is rich in oil and gas resources but the region is relatively poor in terms of amenities and infrastructures. This poverty stems from the fact that the area is largely rural and the people there are peasant farmers. It is considered a paradox that an area so rich in natural resources that sustain the economy of a country of over 160 million people is subjected to untold poverty. This view was echoed by Osaghe (1995) when he stated that even though Nigeria's main source of revenue is derived from the Niger Delta, the region belongs to the ranks of the most backward and politically marginalized groups in the country. This is further complicated by environmental degradation and pollution occasioned by oil exploitation in the area. As Ajaero (2008 pg 20) noted, ''the exploration activities have led in some cases to the systematic debasement and assault on the oil communities leading to the collapse of the

eco-system". These maladies have been eliciting negative effects among the people of the region particularly the youth who have traveled to other parts of the country and have seen the rate of development in such areas especially the city of Lagos and Abuja. Moreover, there have been agitations by civil society groups within and outside the region who have been calling for a fair treatment of the area in terms of development. Reactions to these problems of neglect, marginalization and environmental degradation can even be traced to the pre-colonial era. The Royal Niger Company (RNC) by its action tried to deprive the people of their legitimate trade and industry. The opposition given to the British merchants by people like King William Dappa Pepple of Bonny in 1854, was met with a serious sanction of deposition and banishment from the area (Oloya and Ugbeyavwighren 2009), similarly Jaja of Opobo was deposed and exiled to the West Indies when he challenged the British merchants on exploration without a deserving reward to the people of the community. The same fate befell Prince Nana of Itsekiri and the Oba of Benin around1897.

What characterized the reactions to this struggle by the authorities (which is of interest to this study) is the use of force. This practice of meeting agitations and conflict with force is liened in this article view as less effective than the traditional use of conflict resolution, unfortunately, this approach was continued by the military regime of Sanni Abacha when he declared war against Ken Saro-Wiwa a notable voice in the struggle for justice for the people of the Niger Delta who passionately campaigned for international attention to the plight of his people. He ended being hanged for this struggle. The thought of the government then was that killing him would lay to rest the age-long troubles coming from the region. However, that was not to be as many militants' groups sprang up to continue the struggle especially during the third republic and fourth republics that had Olusegun Obasanjo and Musa Yar'adua as presidents respectively. The new militant groups included: Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) Egbesu boys, among others. With the emergence of these groups, the conflict took a new dimension as what used to be largely peaceful protests metamorphosed into violent protests involving infliction of injuries, abduction of expatriates, vandalisation of pipeline among several other

acts. This brought a huge loss to the country in terms of revenue generation. Nigeria slide into recession in 2016, partly on the account of the restiveness in the Niger Delta region. The justification for these acts is the need for the liberation and emancipation of the region .

Study Objectives:

1.   To examine the prospects of traditional method in resolving conflicts arising from perceived injustice

2.   To ascertain the preference of people in the use of different methods of resolving inter-group conflict arising from perceived injustice

3.   To examine the people's attitudes to perceived injustice

Theoretical framework

The study adopts a tripartite model of social justice as proposed by Fraser (2005). According to Fraser, groups can suffer from three types of injustice which she identified as: (1) socioeconomic, (2) cultural-symbolic, and political domination, and (3) misrepresentation. She explained that socio-economic injustices have to do with unfair distribution of material resources, which can be evident in economic exploitation, marginalization, and deprivation of a group among other groups (Fraser, 1995). The experience of the people of the Niger Delta is succinctly captured in this dimension of social injustice because one of the reasons advanced for the grouse of the group has been linked to economic exploitation, marginalization, and deprivation (Osaghe, 1995). Again Cultural-symbolic injustices, on the other hand, are those concerned with lack of recognition of a people of an area and this include cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect. The people of the Niger Delta believe that they were not given their due recognition. Consequently, their children were hardly considered for appointments in business organizations in their region. Rather people come from other areas to take jobs that their children should have been offered a chance to get in the first place, thereby undermining their relevance and group identity. Moreover, the people of the area felt undermined by the fact that they were not fully represented politically especially considering

the fact that they constitute the minority in the political arrangement of the country, which means that the people were not sufficiently represented in government This was also a serious complaint by the Niger Delta people that they were not elected into positions of political power until the emergence of President Goodluck Jonathan who hailed from this area.

According to Fraser, social economic Injustices can be addressed through the re-distribution of economic resources, while cultural-symbolic injustices can be resolved by offering due recognition. In her later work, (Fraser, 2008; 2009), she argued that representation has become very critical to current struggles for justice globally. This status model, as she called it, highlighted the importance of transnational politics and governance structures that must be taken into account when considering economic and cultural injustices. Representation-related injustices are linked to social inequality and, more specifically, social status, which, in Fraser's terms, can be resolved by providing "recognition of people's standing as full partners in social interaction [who are] able to participate as peers with others in social life". Tis can be achieved by ensuring participatory parity in political claims-making (Dahl et al., 2004, p. 377). It was noted that certain groups may suffer from all three types of injustices simultaneously. Redistribution does little beyond providing concessions to the disadvantaged groups, because it does not "challenge the deep structures that generate class disadvantage" (Fraser, 1995)

Inter-group conflict and Psychological distress

 In the literature on intergroup conflict, the direct competition for valuable but limited resources is found to induce hostility between or among groups, (Levins & Campbell, 1972). Thus, people who feel that they are the 'owner' of the resources expect a fair share in the proceeds derived from the exploitation of the resources in terms of infrastructural provisions. Moreover, if a group perceive that other groups within the same geographical space, i.e, a nation fare better in jobs, power and status than them, this situation can cause a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and resentment (Sharon et al, 2005). Similarly, it is also found in the existing literature that apart from a realistic competition for resources, people may become resentful of other groups because they perceived themselves as relatively

deprived, i.e. the thinking that they are poor compared to others (Hong .., 2001 Wong, & Liu; Walker & Smith, 2002). Moreover, people can become resentful of other groups if they have a perception of threats to their group, The scenario highlighted above also describes the Niger Delta's situation, because it can be said that the area is relatively poor in comparison to their counterpart in south west, south east and some other parts of the country. The people of the Niger delta often complained that government and other people from other parts of the country have failed to compensate them well for the resources from their area, thus, they face a threat of survival as a group (Smith et al., 1999).

The intergroup conflict from Niger Delta thus comes with a heavy psychological cost. This is because apart from the stress associated with living in constant fears of attacks and counter attacks from the freedom fighters and the authorities, residents in this community lived with the feelings of abandonment, sense of despair and the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that goes with the loss of their source of livelihood, ecological damage of their ancestral land and loss of control of their own environment. They were in the middle of a fight between their own children whom they believe have their best interest and at the same time the government whose means of economic survival is being destroyed. Previous studies show that people in conflict-affected area suffered from the bad consequences in their mental health, (Srinivasa & Rashmi, 2006). The psychological complications that are consequences of conflicts are well reported in past and current studies. Some of the consequences include: depression, anxiety, irritability, emotional instability, social instability, cognitive disturbance, and behavioural disturbance (Srinivasa & Rashmi, 2006). For example A study conducted on 45 Kurdish families post conflict on the survivors in two displacement camps revealed that PTSD was present in 60% of their caregivers and 87% of children (Ahmad, Sundelin-Wahlsten, Knorring 2000).

The negative consequences of conflict were what led to the resolution of the World Health Assembly in May 2005, which urged member states "to strengthen action to protect children from armed conflict" and the resolution of the WHO Executive Board in January 2005, which urged the

"support for implementation of programmes to repair the psychological damage of war, conflict and natural disasters" (WHO, 2005). In addition, the WHO estimated that people who experience traumatic events will develop serious mental health problems and another 10% will develop behavior that will hinder their ability to function effectively. The most common conditions are depression, anxiety and psychosomatic problems such as insomnia, or back and stomach aches" (WHO, 2001). Thus, any study aimed at searching for means of resolving conflict more effectively would naturally generate huge interest. Hence, the reason for the study in making contribution to practical ways of resolving intergroup conflict.

Hypotheses:

·   In experimental situations, participants would express preference for the adoption of traditional methods of conflict resolution in addressing inter-ethnic group conflict that are due to perceived injustice.
·   Participants with same ethnic background with leader would support the use of non-traditional methods than participants that do not have same ethnic background with the leader.
·   Subjects would differ significantly based on their ethnic groups, on the belief in violent demonstration as an appropriate reaction to perceived social injustice.

METHOD

Research Design

The research is an experimental study which was conducted under a controlled environment. The design was adopted because of the need to manipulate visuals and see how subjects would respond to some specific questions on the variable of interest, and how this might influence choice of conflict resolution methods.

Study Setting

The study was carried out in the psychology laboratory of the Psychology department of a University in Nigeria

Participants.

The study targeted undergraduates, who were in their third year at the Faculty of Social sciences at the University of Lagos. The total number of participants was 240. These students come from different parts of Nigeria, i.e, south east, southwest, and the northern region. They had voted before in an election before to either of the two dominant parties in Nigeria, Action Progressive party of Nigeria (APC), People Democratic Party (PDP) and on the basis of that they accepted to be either progressives or conservative as regards political affiliations. They were all thoroughly briefed and only those who freely gave their consent got selected to participate in the study. In spite of the free consent, any subject could opt out of the study at any stage of the research.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

60 participants were engaged for the study. They were randomly selected from a combined class of 240 Sociology and Psychology undergraduate students of the University of Lagos. They were assigned based on their ethnic groups. The first group consisted of individuals who were members of the ethnic group in government of the country (Hausa/Fulani) this choice was informed by the need of the study to see if their responses would be different from that of other groups in view of the fact that they have ethnic connections to the person(s) taking decisions on resource allocations and enforcement of rules and regulations in the country. Others were assigned proportionally to south west, south east and south south groups.

Procedures

The subjects were asked to view the video of a recorded violent demonstration against the government involving destructions of public property and other valuables in the public that took place in the country. Subsequently, a narrator was shown explaining graphically that the demonstrators were victims of economic and social deprivations. They were people who should have lived a more decent lives if they were not victims of social injustice, there were also pictures of their poor living conditions and their life struggles in their communities were displayed in the videos that

lasted for about 15 minutes though there were no information about their ethnic background. However, the narrator offered that the reason for the violent action was due to their perception of the unfair treatment by the authorities especially when they believe that others were better off in this regard.

Subjects were asked such questions as (1) whether the agitations' actions were justifiable (2) whether they would do same if they were in the shoes of the violent demonstrator, (3) If they were familiar with the experience of the situation of people they just watched on the video. A few other questions were asked relating to the video watched and then the researcher proceeded to ask the subjects to select in order of preference the perceived efficacy of an array of methods for resolving the conflict which were written boldly on papers which were displayed on a table for each participant. The methods included prosecution, dialogue, force, mediation, propaganda, negotiation, and war. The different methods were all displayed before participants who were asked to pick and arrange in order of importance and efficacy in conflict resolution Thereafter, the researcher recorded what each participant picked in the order of selection. All subjects came in at different times not seeing what the other subject had picked. Records were kept on what each participant selected according to the order of selection. The data collected from the 60 participants were analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 and all the results were evaluated accordingly. The descriptive data of the demographics of the respondents was analysed using simple percentage and frequency while the responses on conflict resolution method was done with the aid of the Mean Item Score (MIS) and their successive ranks were obtained and the choice selected were classified under the Traditional and modern methods of conflict resolution according to the study's definition. The Pearson chi-square test was also done using the cross tab on

Hypothesis 1 In experimental situation Participants would express preference for the adoption of traditional methods of conflict resolution in addressing inter-ethnic group conflict.

Table 1.0: Subject's Preference of the (traditional) Conflict Resolution Methods

Conflict Resolution Methods	Mean	Std. Deviation
Dialogue	1.95	1.44
Negotiation	2.98	1.79
Reconciliation	3.12	1.62
Redistribution	4.4	1.64

Table 2.0: Subject's Preference of the various Conflict Resolution Methods

Conflict Resolution Methods	Mean	Std. Deviation
Propaganda	5.17	1.79
Prosecution	6.23	1.74
Arrest	6.43	2.09
Force	6.58	1.71
War	8.33	1.14

The respondents expressed preference for the use of traditional method to conflict resolution than for the modern method. In this research, what is considered as the traditional method include such methods as i. dialogue, mediation, negotiation and reconciliation. In the data presented the highlighted methods have favorable ratings with Dialogue having the mean score of 1.95 and SD = 1.44, Negotiation M = 2.98, SD = 1.79, Reconciliation, M = 3.12, SD = 1.62 and Redistribution, M= 4.4, SD = 1.64 The modern method which is considered by this paper to include propaganda, prosecution arrest and war got lower rating in preference with the following scores, with propaganda having the mean score of 5.17 SD =1.79 , prosecution M = 6.23, SD = 1.74, Arrest M = 6.43,S.D = 2.09, Force M= 6.58, SD = 1.71, War. M= 8.33, SD =1.14

Hypothesis 2 Participants from the ethnic group where the leader come from would support the use of force than participants that come from conflict affected area in conflict resolution.

Table3.0 showing a summary of Chi-Square result of ethnic groups against of the conflict resolution methods

	Value	df	Assym. (2tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.45	1	.038
Likelihood Ratio	4.32	1	.053
Linear-by Linear			
Association	4.01	1	.032
No of cases	60		

$X^2(1,N=60)= 4.45$

There was a significant relationship between ethnic affiliation and choice of method for conflict resolution. In the present experimental study participants would likely support methods which are not traditional being adopted by the policymaker that they have ethnic connections with.

Hypothesis 3. participants would differ on the notion that engaging in violent demonstration is an appropriate reaction to perceived social injustice

Table4.0 showing the Analysis of assigned groups on belief in violent demonstration to perceived social injustice

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between groups	152 .423	2	1151.623	11.052	.000
Within group	5901.150	60	122.708		
Total	**6053.573**	**62**			

P>.05

The result of the one way ANOVA in the table shows that there was no statistically significant difference among the mean scores of the three ethnic groups on engaging in violent demonstration for social injustice approval to violent demonstration as determined by one-way ANOVA (F (2, 164) = 11.052, $P > 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore rejected. Subjects score on the notion differ significantly

Discussion.

Even though the use of coercive method of conflict resolution is more often adopted by authorities, the reality as shown with the result of this study is that people prefer the alternative method of intergroup conflict resolution which usually involve a mediator(s) that help(s) use strategies such as dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation to help find peace This finding is supported by Lederach (2005) who described dialogue as a tool for understanding the grievances and interest of an aggrieved group. He opined that it is a sustainable means of settling intergroup conflicts Other studies also give credence to the effectiveness of these alternative methods (see Eidsvåg, Lindholm, & Sveen 2004) . As expected, war was the least preferred option in inter-group conflict resolution and quite interestingly, the study was unable to find a support to the influence of political ideology in the choice of method for conflict resolution. This is obviously the thinking of this time, that war should not be an option in inter-group conflict (Fitzduff, & Stout, 2006).

The scenario described in the Niger Delta in Nigeria area confirms the assertion of Tajfel who pointed out that an unequal distribution of resources can induce antagonism between dominant and subordinates groups. This because latter group may thus resort to acts of aggression aimed at changing the status quo. Expectedly, the dominant group will react to the development, and an intergroup conflict arises. Moreover, Lind and Tyler (1988) opined that people's disposition towards out-group is largely determined by their perception of the fairness of the group or its members in how resources are distributed including whether they are carried along in the process, and the rules for such distribution (Asekun, 2018).

The hypothesis two which confirms that ethnic background has a relationship with whether one would accept the use of nontraditional methods if

the person in power has same ethnic background is in line with the system justification theory which states that members of a dominant group or persons affiliated to politicians in power through ethnic connections or other means would support any action that is aimed at upholding the stability of the polity in order to maintain the status quo. (see Jost & Hunyady (2005). This is usually the situation in Nigeria where the kith and kin of any individual in government always support the action of the individual even when the policy appears obnoxious.

The third hypothesis which could not be supported shows that ethnicity is not a factor in how people react to social injustice. However, there are studies which show that persistent deprivations can lead to frustration and consequently violence. (see Berkowitz, 1989,)

Conclusion

Since nature did not endow natural resources among peoples equally within a geographical entity, its exploitation and the allocation of its proceeds among the groups would always arouse tension. Thus, inter-group conflict is inevitable in our world, but humanity has the responsibility of handling inter-group conflicts responsibly in a way and manner that physical or psychological harms are prevented. The way to achieve this is through the adoption of dialogue, negotiation, redistribution and reconciliation.

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