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Peace Building and Conflict Transformation in Nigeria: The Role of De Norsemen Kclub Incorporated in an Environmentally Challenged Society, 1982-2018

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Abstract

This paper examined the role of De Norsemen Kclub Incorporated in peace building and conflict transformation in an environmentally challenged society like Nigeria. Over the years, environmental crisis has become a re-occurring decimal that threatens the sovereignty of Nigeria with the civil societies, religious leaders and nongovernmental organisations seeking to proffer solutions. However, arguments have raged on whether or not De Norsemen has the capacity to ensure peace and resolve conflict in a volatile country like Nigeria. Some are of the opinion that De Norsemen Kclub lacks the legitimate powers to maintain peace because of their inclination to school cult gangs and therefore, they should be proscribed. Other side of the argument opines that De Norsemen Kclub Incorporated are legitimate organization registered under the Corporate Affairs Commission whose motto is “service to humanity” and since conflict is a threat to human security, they therefore have the powers to advocate for peace. Against this background, this paper argued that peace building and conflict transformation are concepts in conflict resolution strategies that are often taken to ensure that conflicts in the society are deescalated and reduced to the barest minimal. The position of the paper is that De Norsemen Kclub is not associated with any form of cultism, they operate under the sovereign constitution of Nigeria and has right like other nongovernmental organisations to make peace and resolve conflict in Nigeria.

Key Words: Peace building, conflict transformation, De Norsemen, environment, society

Introduction

Peace-building and conflict transformation are recent concepts in peace and conflict studies. The two concepts are said to be closely related thus, they both work to ensure that there is a

conflict-free environment and society. In Africa, and every other part of the world, the history of man is shrouded with conflict and since then, man has been at the epicentre of making peace and creating conflict. This is because; man lives in an environment in which what gives him happiness also causes him pains. This clearly shows that right from time, there exists a competitive environment with scarce resources in which man needs to eliminate and manipulate the ecosystem in order to satisfy his wants. By doing this, he becomes responsible for making troubles and providing peaceful environment for advancing his needs. The implication shows that humans are always looking for an opportunity for making peace and creating conflict in the society and it is expected that when this conflict occurs measures should be taken to avoid the escalation of the conflict. These measures include the resolution of the conflict through peace-making, enforcement or by undertaking proactive measures such as peace-building and conflict transformation that would stop the occurrence of the conflict at the first instance.

By this, Folarin maintained that the field of Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS) is not yet a paradigmatic community. This is because, there is yet, no common agreement on the concepts of peace and conflict since what creates peace can generate conflict. Scholars of social conflict have often perceived conflict as an opposite of Peace however a study on peace and conflict has revealed that peace can exist side by side with conflict. This implies that there are instances in which there will be peace yet, there will be conflict (Odoh&Amiara, 2013, p. 1). To this extent, conflict generally is not an opposite of peace but could be seen as a vice because of its destructive capacity to human existence hence, conflict is not only destructive but also constructive and it is the constructive aspect of conflict that often translates to societal development thus, leading to building a standard state that will be value oriented.

In Nigeria, conflict has become part of the nation-building. There are conflicts arising from ethnic marginalization, environmental degradation, political instability and religious crises. Instances of these conflicts have shown that there are usually neutral bodies or organisations that often undertake to stop the occurrence of conflict at its pre-conflict stage. For example, it is important to understand that community leaders, women's groups, journalists, businessmen and women have demonstrated that their influences could extend beyond that of soldiers and politicians. However, there are other bodies such as De Norsemen Kclub who have demonstrated the capacity for complementing government efforts through the provision of essential services and aids to the needy populations in order to ensure that conflicts within their areas of operation are brought to halt.

Even though De Norsemen Kclub has over the years played a very significant role in peace-building and conflict transformation, this role remains unnoticed especially as the De Norsemen Kclub's legality, legitimacy and value-free social organisation are yet to be appreciated. There are people in some quarters who labelled De Norsemen "cultists" and the others who opined that they are "gangsters" that operate within the provisions of law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which prevent them from being arrested. This school of thought further holds that De Norsemen Kclub is a "cult gang" but a reformed cultist. This treatise is a refutation of such assumption that De Norsemen is a "cult gang", it is a social group that seeks to promote unity in diversity and Nigerian cultures.

Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is a product of Eastern Mennonite School of peace building that was introduced by John Paul Lederach (1995). Conflict transformation however is a concept that goes beyond conflict resolution. It is a process in which a long-standing relationship is built through a process of change in perceptions and attitudes of parties. Its aim is to change the parties, their relationships and the condition that created the conflict (2007, p. 95). By this, Jeong (2000) maintained that conflict transformation entails the coming into being of new situations involving conflict issues, perceptions, relationships and communication patterns. Lederach (1995) saw conflict transformation as change. In fact, he opines that it can be seen descriptively in the changes created by social conflict and prescriptively in the deliberate intervention by third parties to create change. Conflict transformation is very important in the resolution of conflict because it allows parties into conflict to work out modalities towards changing conflicting environment to peaceful one. This ensures that individual or groups have tendencies to positively change poorly functioning communication. The implication is that, these changes can occur at personal or group level. In other words, this change at the personal level, involves emotional, perceptual and spiritual aspects of change desired for the individual. It is in this regard that conflict becomes part of man's social life affecting his relationship with people and other group relations. Coser(1956) conceived conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (1956, p. 3).

Similarly, Dougherty and Pfaller (1981, p. 181), conceptualise conflict as a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings...is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable groups because groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals. This implies that conflict is inevitable part of human existence. It is a means and not an end itself to social development hence, Burton (1987, pp. 137-8), maintained that conflict like sex is an essential creative element in human relationship. It is the means to change, the means by which our social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved ...indeed conflict like sex is to be enjoyed.

Peace-Building

Peace building applies to a situation of a low conflict and high prospect for development. It is a post-war reconciliation phenomenon that often emphasizes that parties into conflict have the capacity of establishing peaceful relationships through initiating joint community projects or a third-party negotiating peace by dealing with issues that caused the war. Lederach (1994, p.14), defined peace building as efforts to transform potentially violent social relations into sustainable relations and outcomes. The 1986 International Conference on peace-building defined the concept as "...a positive, continuous cooperative human endeavour to build bridges between conflicting nations and groups. It aims to enhance understanding and communication and dispel the wandering roots of distrust, fear and hate" (International Conference on peace-building, 1986).

Peace-building is expected to create attitudes, behaviours and structure which will make future conflict improbable. For this reason, Halitza (1994) describes the term as the deliberate and systematic build-up of interactions, dense and durable, initiating a state in which the resumption of conflict would be improbable. Therefore, Harbottle (1985) identified the

physical reconstructive component of peace-building in a post-war environment when he says that peace-building is a process of socio-economic reconstruction, development and expansion in conflict scarred and deprived areas and among underprivileged people. The implication of Harbottle's definition of peace-building is that, the concept represents the process in which the alleged fear of the parties into social conflict is proportionately reduced in order to rebuild their confidence that conflict among them has been brought to halt. This means that peace-building is more meaningful after the cessation of hostilities, and involves things like assisting refugees and displaced persons to return and resettle in their homes; removal of abandoned mines especially in residential areas; provision of food, water, drugs and clothing; activation of damaged electricity and water supply lines, organization of elections, election monitoring, reconstruction of infrastructure like roads and bridges, rebuilding of damaged schools and hospitals, retaining of army and police. Most importantly, peace-building deals with the root causes of the conflict and relates to confidence building.

Peace-building has been defined in different ways by different scholars, institutions, agencies and departments of peace. The term was first used in the 1970s by Johan Galtung (1996, p. 112) when he called for the creation of peace building structures as a process of promoting sustainable peace by addressing the 'root causes' of violent conflict, and by supporting indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution. Since then, peace-building assumed a dominant factor in the pursuit of global peace and security. Over the years, scholars and institutions who have elaborated on the definition of peace building had provided different meaning to the subject of peace-building. Thus, the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali was in 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace*, defined peace building as an action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Therefore, Issifu (2015) the concept of peace building has different definitions by several departments, institutions, schools, agencies and scholars. For example, Call and Cousens (2007), have defined peace building as those actions undertaken by international or national actors to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict (negative peace) and a modicum of participatory politics (as a component of positive peace) that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation. Similarly, Porter (2007), defined peace-building to mean all processes that build positive relationships, heal wounds, reconcile antagonistic differences, restore esteem, respect rights, meet basic needs, enhance equality, instill feelings of security, empower moral agency and are democratic, inclusive and just. Therefore, peace psychologists have described peace building in terms of resolution, being proactive, problem solving, meeting human needs, and ending oppression and inequality.

Peace-building therefore means a process of instilling cordial relationship and providing environment that forestalls hostility in order to ensure peaceful co-existence. It means a long and painstaking process which cannot be achieved in a hurry or within a fixed time limit. Hence failure to recognize this may mean that resources, monies and hard-won improvements are often wasted.

Nigeria and the Environmentally Challenged States

States in Nigeria have been and are still environmentally challenged by one conflict or the other. These conflicts arose as a result of state or institutional failure. However, depending on the region or locality one finds oneself, their operations, nature and causes vary as one takes step towards investigating the cause, management and their resolution. From north to the west and east to the south, there are conflicts taking place simultaneously and continued to threaten Nigerian national security. There are Boko Haram and Fulani herdsman crises in the North,

kidnapping activities in the West, farmers-herders conflict in the East and militant operations in South-south. Government at all levels have sought to resolve these conflicts through amnesty programme however, conflict entrepreneurs and actors have continued to cash in from the mismanagement of the whole exercise to escalate the conflicts. These have constituted serious security threats and made Nigeria haven for criminals. Moreover, policy-makers, civil society and independent conflict mediators have one way or the other negotiated peace and suggested measures to be taken towards ending these crises however; the crises have continued to increase in forms on daily basis and thus, left many Nigeria to wonder whether the Nigerian security agents are incapable of arresting the situation. Indeed, despite corporate bodies, nongovernmental organizations and religious groups embarking on peace education to sensitize and educate the populace on this menace, the crisis has continued unabated as the actors have cited one reason or the other as the bane for the conflict.

In Niger Delta, the activities of oil companies in exploring crude resources have led to the militarization and volatility of the region. This is not good for the security of Nigeria as criminals are now in the possession of arms.

De Norsemen Kclub Incorporated

De Norsemen Kclub is a socio-cultural organization that is committed to the propagation of unity in diversity mantra of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was born out of the burning desire of young Nigerians who are committed to the maintenance of peace and preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage. In fact, De Norsemen Kclub International is a worldwide organization made up of brothers of like mind with the sole aim of bettering humanity and members of the organization (Anchorage Magazine, 2017, p. 2). It seeks to stick together and foster the welfare of each individual member, the immediate communities and world at large. De Norsemen Kclub Inc is a responsive organization of responsible men duly registered with Cooperate Affairs Commission (CAC) RC7458 under the extent laws of Nigeria and foreign countries (Anchorage Magazine, 2018, p. 27).

The history of the Norsemen or Norse people dates back to the period of Nordic Stone Age of about 1900 AD, they were referred as the North Germanic peoples of the Early Middle Ages during which they spoke old Norse language and practiced old Norse religion (The Norsemen, 2018). The language belongs to the Northern Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages and it is the predecessor of the modern Germanic languages of Scandinavia. The term Norsemen does relate to “Northman” which applied to Norse-speakers by the people they encountered during the Middle Age (Nielson, 2006, pp. 584-86). Similarly, the old Frankish word Northmann “Northman” was Latinised as Normannus and was used in Latin texts. The Latin word Normannus then entered old French as Normands. From this word, came the name of the Normans and of Normandy which was settled by Norsemen in the 10th Century.

The word Norsemen first appears in English during the early 19th Century. It was coined using the adjective Norse which was borrowed into English from the Dutch during the 19th Century with the sense “Norwegian” and which by Scott’s time had acquired the sense of relating to Scandinavia or its languages in ancient or medieval times.

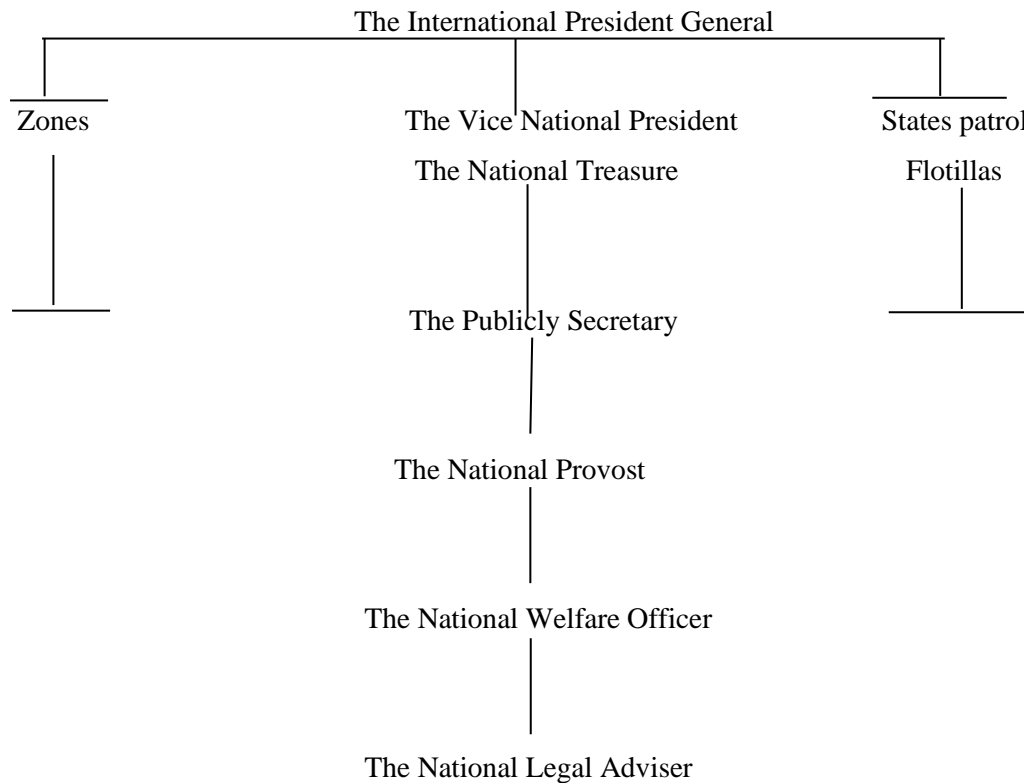
Organs and De Norsemen Kclub Leadership

De Norsemen Kclub Inc operates a very regimented lifestyle. It operates in the 36 states of the federation including the FCT and has branches all over the world. Its headquarters is located at River State called national headquarters. However, there are state branches known as “state

patrols” whereas the international branches are called “Diaspora Marine Patrols”. More so, there are regional branches called “zones”. It operates in five organs otherwise known as the components of Kclub. These include:

1. The Board of Trustees
2. The Saily Council
3. The National Executive Council
4. The Norsemen Advisory Council
5. The Patrols and Flotillas.

Beyond this organogram, the Kclub is headed by the international President with 7 other officers who help to coordinate the activities of the Kclub during its congresses. The state branches are headed by Guv’ners and 7 other officers while the zone branches are headed by the directors appointed by the international president. It organizes two congresses of one national and one international yearly. The leadership operates on two years tenure with the option for re-election for another two years. The diagram below shows the organogram of De Norsemen Kclub Incorporated



The Role of De Norsemen in Peace Building and Conflict Transformation

De Norsemen Kclub is an organization committed to fighting injustice. As a socio-cultural organization, it is bound by common objective for pursuing peace and unity among its members to the society at large. By this, the Constitution of the Norsemen Kclub maintained that “we believe in God, Brotherhood of man, love and justice” hence the motto “service to humanity” (De Norsemen Magazine, 2019, p. 1). The impact of their services to humanity all

over the world including UK, USA, China, Malaysia, India, Philippine, Belgium, Germany, Turkey, Italy, Brazil, Cyprus, South Africa, Canada, Togo, UAE and Ghana are measurable. This they do by giving aids to war effected people and equally, help to sensitize disputant parties on the disadvantages of war hence their role in peace-building and conflict transformation.

Peace-building and conflict transformation are post conflict reconciliatory strategies geared toward ending the reoccurrence of conflict in a conflict environment. The Norsemen kclub has pursued peace through number of programmes such as peace education, provision of relief materials to physical challenged persons and indigent people in various states of the federation. One of its objectives as captured in her constitution maintains that De Norsemen Kclub is to engage in activities like talk-shows, symposium and communal development programmes, seminars that will promote and encourage responsible national development (en.m.wikipedia).

In line with this datum, members of De Norsemen Kclub often hold seminars and public lectures during their congresses to articulate and discuss pressing issues of government policies with a view to suggesting to the government on how to address security challenges and also ensure good governance. By this, Magnus Nze (2019) maintained that the convention is when the members come together to discuss contemporary issues bordering on Nigeria and the world at large, and at the end of the deliberations issue a communiqué on how to move the nation forward. It is on this promise that the Cross River State and Ebonyi State chapters of De Norsemen Kclub met to discuss on how to broker peace between the two warring Ukelle of Yala Local Government of Cross River State and Mfuma of Izzi Local Government of Ebonyi State. The effort was frustrated by irritant warriors and entrepreneurs that feed from the crumbs of funds designated to prosecute the war. However, the war that started since 2005 is said to have claimed about 98 people with about 160 persons injured and 300 houses torched (2019).

In River State, there have been persistent sensitization of the populace against environmentally threaten society in other states of Niger Delta area. The campaign was to advise the youth against causing crisis on streets of River State. Similarly, in Cross River State De Norsemen Kclub supported the restructuring of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in combating crimes in the state. According to Sam Odoh,

In a reaction to the recent clamour for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigerian Police Force in some parts of Nigeria, members of the Cross River State Chapter of De Norsemen Kclub took to the streets of the historical city of Calabar on the 21st of December 2017 in a peace demonstration in support of SARS and to call for its sustenance (Odoh, 2018, p. 12).

He further observed that they marched in collaboration with other association such as the Public Community Relations Committee (PCRC) Cross River State Chapter, Civil Society Organization, and members of the public.

In Ebonyi state, its members have worked with State Security Agents to fish out criminals in the state. Crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, thuggery, rape and inter-cult conflicts have reduced because of the peace education usually undertaken by De Norsemen Kclub, Ebonyi State Chapter. In other states, public lectures that border on Nigerian economy,

security and politics are periodically conveyed to educate the general public and contribute peace building in the country.

De Norsemen Kclub and the Service to Humanity

Another important role of De Norsemen Kclub to the society is her contributions and services to humanity. As part of her objectives, De Norsemen designate every 15th October as De Norsemen day. Being used to commemorate with the less privileges and internally displaced persons Agughasi (2018, p. 7) maintained that for clarity, October has been chosen as a historical and traditional month of festivals according to Nordic Mythology. While 'The Day 15th' was coined by counting letters in the word; De Norsemen Kclub, October 15th has now become a day chosen to institutionalize services to humanity, a day set aside to mark assiduous work to confront the evils and ills against humanity. In carrying out selfless services to the downtrodden, members of the club all over the world often buy item materials such as clothes, groundnut oil, palm oil, salt, magi, bags of rice, garri and other cooking items to denote to the less privileges.

In 15 October, 2018, the Ebonyi State chapter of De Norsemen celebrated with the prison inmates at the Abakaliki Prison Headquarters while her Cross River counterpart visited Prison Headquarters Calabar. In the same vein, the Akwa Ibom State chapter denoted edible items as well as disinfectants and toiletries to inmates of the Medium Security Prison in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. This was preceded by a thanksgiving Service at Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel) ItiamEdem Akai Assembly. In this regard, Umoh (2018: 22) notes that as an organization whose motto is 'service to humanity' De Norsemen Kclub remains committed to serving the society and giving hope to the hopeless and defense to the defenseless. In Lagos, the Lagos state chapter visited KirikiriPrsion while the Oyo state chapter visited Rosarian Home to commemorate abandoned people in Ibadan North Local Government Area. There was also free medical screening exercise to the residents of Akpasak Estate community in Uyo and in June 2018, members of De Norsemen were in Immanuel General Hospital, Eket, to make free and voluntary blood donation to the medical facilities.

In 2019, state chapters of De Norsemen all over Nigeria visited orphanage homes, IDP camps, hospitals, widow care and distributed different kinds of material to the less privileges. In Ebonyi State, the Kclub members were seen along Ogoja Road in the State capital sharing food to destitute on 15th October, 2019 before proceeding to commemorate with the wife of their deceased organizing secretary in which they presented a cheque of four hundred thousand to her.

Below is the picture of some humanitarian services rendered by De Norsemen Kclub to indigent persons including the destitute and prisoners in Nigeria

SHARKS MP



The past is your lesson. The present is your gift. The future is your motivation

Saratoga in Pictures

Service to Humanity

VISITATION TO DECEASED MEMBER'S WIDOWS



KIRIKIRI & IKOT EKPENE PRISONS VISITATION



VISITATION TO ORPHANAGES

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Saratoga Page 30
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Conclusion

Peace-building and conflict transformation are important strategies of conflict management. However, Conflict management is best understood as any effort to control or contain an ongoing conflict between politically motivated actors operating at the state or sub-state level, typically through involvement of a third party (1990, p. 2). It is centrally concerned with making an ongoing conflict less damaging to the parties directly engaged in it. In other words, conflict management is a process in which government, civil society or parties into conflict decide to embark on programmes that could lead to peaceful co-existence. In crisis situation, peace building is important because it leads to confidence building, removal of suspicion to ensure social harmony, unity and cooperation among the conflicting parties. Building peace relates to conflict transformation which has to do with the de-escalation of the conflict situation.

In Nigeria, environmental conflicts have provided a litmus test of an area with high degree of conflicts. These conflicts have been managed in number of ways by different governmental organisations, corporate organisations and parties. One of those organisations is De Norsemen Kclub, established in Nigeria in 1982 at University of Port Harcourt by young men with proven character bound by religio-cultural values, objectives and obedient to the supreme law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Since then, this organisation has contributed towards translating conflict environment to pro-peace environment. By doing that, they organize converges, seminars and public lectures where peace education is carried to all corners of the country. It is to this extent that Ogar Egbe (2018, p. 18) noted that in today's world, we have some big problems facing the human race. The threats of global warfare, destruction of the environment, global warming, over population and totalitarianism are just a few of the problems we as Norsemen are going to solve if we are going to survive the rapidly approaching new era.

In achieving these objectives, De Norsemen Kclub has contributed in different ways to ensure that conflicts in Nigerian environment are de-escalated so that peace and security among Nigerians will be ensured.

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