

CRISES AND CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: A LITERARY EXAMINATION OF DOMINANT THEMES

E. M. IJI

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines varied causes of recurrent crises and conflicts in Nigeria, in particular with relevant references to other cultures. The dominant themes examined include, in epistemic context, crisis and conflict management, as delimited in terms of their ethno-religiosity, role of state security agencies vis-à-vis conflict resolution, Nigeria's economic crisis in diverse ramifications, and suggested solutions etc. It also discusses language and communication in conflict resolution, land as emotive conflict dynamics, as well as inclusive temperaments as conflict magma. Similarly, religious phenomena, management of poverty, communication gap, cultural tolerance, with emphasis on the media – as the message essences as valid ingredients of crisis-and-conflict shooting are intimately discussed. The paper concludes that the themes here broached are foundational to discussing and tackling various recurrent issues on Nigeria's hydra-headed socio-political and related problems.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria's, Crisis, Conflict, Management, Resolution: A literary exposition.

Preamble

The dynamism of human society, a collection of dynamic human beings is a very significant characteristic of its liveliness. Crises are parts and parcels of such dynamism and liveliness. In this regard, the management of any such crisis becomes a significant challenge and test case for the stuff, toughness and resilience or survivability of the individuals or collectivities implicated in such crises or crises as a culmination of conflicts. Similarly, conflicts can be said to be inalienable, irreducible and unavoidable aspects of life and coexistential imperatives and contradictions in any human community, the homogeneity or variety or differences thereof notwithstanding. In the same vein, the operable resolution of emergent conflicts, avoidable or unavoidable becomes a litmus test of the human variables so implicated, as may be complicated by identifiable excesses of human actions, conditions or experiences. It is in this regard, that I have stated elsewhere (Iji: 2001: 100ff) "that crisis can bring out the best or worst in man depending on his management style". The same is theoretically applicable to any conflict and resolution called for in conflictual thoughts, actions and experiences. Thus a political crisis or conflict demands or calls for political will and related criteria toward durable resolution thereof. The same is no less applicable to other conflicts or crises; religious, military, civil, legal or non-legal.

Epistemic Context

At this point, it may be necessary to briefly clarify the terms crisis, conflict and conflict resolution or management. For in my first and enduring love, the discipline of drama and theatre studies, actions, great or small, tragic or comic, serious or ridiculous must of necessity generate conflict, leading to inevitable complications in the internal or external dynamics, leading to stylized resolution which we call denouement. This phenomenon is intricately effected through the phenomenon of what we also call "the willing suspension of disbelief" or "optique du theatre", a type of artistic or aesthetic faith, which in many ways resembles religious faith or political-action manifesto. The usefulness of such artistic resolution of crisis or conflict is theoretically to provide metaphysical, phenomenological intuitive and philosophical paradigms towards possible practical or realistic solutions to human problems of coexistential imperatives or inevitability. This concept, underlines, *mutantis mutandis*, the reconcilability of

crisis and crisis management; conflict and conflict resolution in principle and practice.

Contextually, crisis can be defined as the summit, the peak, the topmost or ultimate boiling or turning point of counterpointal actions or experience, proving, as it were, a counterpoising, compensating or counter balance measure; inviting an equilibrium deemed possible, toward compromise. The New Webster Dictionary of The English Language International Edition (1995: 229) defines crisis as "the turning point in a disease, the decisive moment, especially in a tragedy, a time of danger or suspense in politics..." crisis can be, like in dramatic sensibilities, sexed up, simulated, stimulated or even provoked towards arranging quick fix solution in terms of its management. This is what Hugh Holman (1976: 129) means when he says that crisis is applied to an episode or incident wherein the situation in which the protagonist finds himself is sure either to improve or grow worse". In this regard, we can distinguish between the term climax, often used confusedly or synonymously with the term crisis. For instance, in a dramatic structure which attempts to mirror human experience in politics, military, religion and other human affairs, climax is a term used to designate a summit or action, especially at the point which the rising action may reverse to become a falling action, in terms of sliding toward a resolution, management-wise. It is in this way among other analogies that the term climax, can be synonymous with crisis.

Speaking dramatically or theatrically also, conflict, according to Holman (118 – 119), is struggle which grows out of the interplay of the two opposing forces in a plot or action. Thus in political, religious or military angles, like in the dramatic or theatrical equivalence or analogies, it is conflict which provides the elements of interest and suspense. In a conflict situation, we can here adopt and adapt Holman's four types of conflict involvement: a protagonist may be struggling against the forces of nature, as exemplified by natural disasters such as flood, hurricane or wicked weather in the manner of the Tsiuname outburst.

In other words, or a protagonist may be caught up in a struggle against another person, usually an antagonist, like in the Obasanjo – Buhari Elections malpractices; in legal or political tangles. Similarly, the protagonist, again, may be caught up in a struggle against society such as the Babangida's military's conspiratorial intrigues in the controversial annulment of the ever fairest and freest election

in Nigeria in 1993, refusing in 1993 to declare Chief MKO Abiola, the deserved winner. In a yet another cause of conflict in this regard could be an ego-maniacal conflict within an individual, who could be a good leader but his leadership potentialities are caught up in a web of vicious contests, compounded by greed, egocentricism and other negative trends leading to unaltruistic leadership manifested in hydra-headed problems of bad governance etc. A fifth possible kind of conflict, cited by Holman could be the struggle against fate or destiny. In this dimension, Holman suggests that, "except where the gods themselves actively appear, such struggle is realized through the action of one or more of the four basic conflicts", profiled here. Holman's adaptable conclusion is that, "Seldom do we find a simple, single conflict in a plot, but rather, even all the elements", suggested as modified above. In most, if not all, of the Nigeria's national question, collectively, as enumerated and discussed later, covering our focus here, "crisis and conflict management in Nigeria since 1980", can be asserted to be variedly implicated and complicated in the above adoptable and adaptable conflict and crisis paradigms and the management imperatives applicable.

Contextually, also, the term Management, with its definitional variants such as Management By Objectives (MBO), Total Quality Management (TQM), vis-à-vis the Strategic and Scientific Management models (SM) among others can be adopted from the Random College Dictionary (1975) as follows:

Management is the act or contrivance that effects a turn-around or accomplishment of a positive end, despite hardship or difficulty. In other words, management is a skillful handling or conscious manipulation that achieves a positive result ideally desired (Iji: 104ff).

Each of the variants enumerated above connotes a shift in emphasis in terms of organizational goal; vision and mission, whether artistic, aesthetic, scientific or socio-political, among other demands or criteria aimed at achieving the best out of available resources; maximizing imperatives such as peace, concords and orderly society desirable.

Crisis and Conflict Management

As discussed elsewhere (Iji:104ff), Crisis Management embraces, inter alia:

The ability to handle, contrive, or manipulate conflict or conflicts at a decisive point wherein the result achieved is a resolution in favour rather than an impasse or quagmire. Call it a break even point, wherein also, the society or humanity attains a blessing rather than a curse.

It is also in this regard that one can assert, as earlier stated that "Crisis can bring out the best or worst in Man, depending on the management skill or style applied towards a resolution". Conflict Management can be no less so. Conflict can be regarded as the engine room of crisis. It is the complication of conflicts that engender crisis. Crisis is the boiling bubble of conflict. There can be hardly any crisis without a conflict as its mother. It is evidently not like the fable of the chicken and the egg as riddle as to which comes first. The focus of this paper, "Theoretical Perspectives on Conflict", treated as an unofficial keynote address, as detailed in the abstract, therefore purports to highlight the roots and ramifications of major conflicts in Nigeria since 1980. It argues that since Crisis is a culmination, peak, or climax of a conflict, the two varied concepts are intricately linked in totality; as inseparable organic whole, just like feet, trunk and head of a living organism or body are

united, and what affects one unit of the whole would affect the other, theoretical perspectives on conflict, inevitably implicate theoretical perspectives thereof on Crisis. Therein lies the Siamese-twin concept applicable in the theme Crisis and Conflict Management in Nigeria, as framed.

Delimitation

Discussing theoretical perspective on conflicts, in focus coincides with the Nigeria's National Political Reform Conference (NPRC). Prior to this, there have been the long-standing agitation for the convocation of a sovereign National Conference (SNC) or just National Conference (NC) or Ethnic National Conference (ENC) as some have also christened it. Under whatever nomenclature, the urgency, the imperativeness and inevitability of a national dialogue to jaw, jaw rather than war, war over the Nigeria's Achilles heels, known collectively as the national question, have become an idea, an exercise and a task whose time has not only come, but has been felt to be very long overdue. Internationally, we have all being witnesses to the courageous attempts being made to reform the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the Security Council, among others of the World Body's agencies, by the Secretary General, Kofi Annan. On the European Union, we have seen the frantic efforts in the works to enlarge, revamp and modernize the organization socio-politically, socio-economically and psycho-culturally. The disintegration of the War-saw Pact as a counter-weight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organizational (NATO), among other conditions have provided fuel for the effectuation of the European Union. No less is applicable to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Americans, led by the Unipolar Power, the United State are doing no less feverishly to reform and update their main footholds and focus of influence, multi-culturally, multilaterally and even unilaterally for economic, political and social relations. Nearer home, we have the African Union (AU) cloned from Organization of African Unity (OAU). The vision and mission of ECOWAS (The Economic Commission of the West African States) are well-known.

The concept of integration that divided we fall, but united we stand is the philosophical guide directing their charters and operations regionally, sub-regionally and therefore global strength and respectability within the comity of Nations. Therein lie their economic, political and even military strengths, as individuals within collectives. The necessity, imperativeness and rational for NEPAD (New Economic Partnership for African Development), NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association) and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), are well-known, to name just a few. Unquestionably, the survivability and longevity of each of these bodies; economic, political or socio-cultural, depends on the constitutional crisis and conflict management safeguards or measures entrenched in it. The same is no less applicable to the crisis and conflict management modus operandi in respect of Nigeria with her multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual among other multi-valent colourations.

Ethno-religious Conflicts

With these efforts at national, regional, sub-regional, continental or intercontinental or sub-continental levels to gear up some of these bodies corporate towards effective posture for the challenges of the twenty-first century, we make haste to examine how Nigeria has been coping with her multivalent epicenters of conflict and crisis magma vis-à-vis the resources or otherwise with which we have managed to sustain the potentially rich and flag independence country so far. It is not far-fetched to suggest that the multi-ethnicity status with which Nigeria is so many times cursed or blessed is the main, call it

German floor foundation of her Achilles heel. Nigeria is calculated to be **blessed or cursed** with over 450 ethnic groups; with **definitely more dialects** or ethnic languages to boot. To complicate this **ethnographic paradigms**, as the root of varied conflicts are the multi-religious valents, with innumerable **sects** of Traditional, Christian and Moslim religions as **ground fuels** for generating varied conflicts and **crisis that Nigeria is always** ridden with, to her developmental handicaps in terms of consistent cohesion, creating and brewing misunderstanding as obstacles to effective communication and co-existential peace and concords.

The Maitatsine riots of the early 1980s are historic examples in this regard. The Sharia imbroglio and misunderstanding and crises that emerged with the conflicts thereof serve as the culmination so far of the ethno-religious conflicts, which gave birth and is still giving birth to other avoidable and unavoidable **frascas**, creating unnecessary badblood-divides between the Nigerian brothers and sisters in the geopolitical north and south of the country.

It is in furtherance of minimizing, avoiding or reducing to the barest minimum the conflict generated or likely to be **generated** by religion complicated by ethnocentricity that one cannot but theorize that if such an emotive force is legislated against in favour of the separation of politics or state from religion, treating religion as a private affair that should be more tolerant of each other, free from the shackles of ethnicity, governmental involvement in terms of funding for pilgrimage, for instance, the better would the marriage of religion and ethnicity on the one hand, and religion and politics on the other be. All would be relatively shorn of their emotional and emotive conflicts and crises magma. Then the more peaceful, developmentally focused and coexistentially tolerant, will it all be, the better for Nigeria. In this regard, Nigeria would be able to **stay atop**, maintaining conflict and crisis shooting paradoxes like the Plateau, Katsina-Ala or even other ethno-religious imbroglios like Ife-mode-Keke and the others in Kaduna and Kano, spilling over to South-eastern, South-western and South-south geopolitical configurations as centers of varied ethnic concentrations with minority religious contradictions, which are caused mostly by fanaticism that creates communication gaps. There is no question that the non-political, non-legal, and almost the ethno-neutral position taken by the federal government of President Obasanjo has been majorly responsible for the better understanding of the Sharia question which nearly blew Nigeria to shreds when it was first introduced in parts of the north. Its modest interpretation of the constitutional provision for its operation as an aspect of the customary rights for all our Moslim brothers and sisters has also helped to stem the tides of an otherwise ugly developments. Religious tolerance, live and let live, worship and let worship should be the main strategies for managing, curtailing or considerably minimizing the recurrent potential ethno-religious conflicts and crises that Nigeria is often ridden with. In furtherance of this, emotive language should be made severely punishable immediately such utterances are made in public fora or media avenues. It is in this regard that one must completely condemn the crisis and conflict management apathy in respect of the numerous killings in ethno-religious conflicts as currently criticized by the African Division of the Amnesty International, to the effect that those identified as slaughterers of the over 1000 people killed across the religious divides in the Plateau crisis have been protected from the due prosecution. Such official complicity with non-punishment of ethno-religious offenders would, no doubt, continue to fuel future crises and conflicts as it had fueled the innumerable ethno-religious conflicts since 1980, and would continue to fuel such as the Amnesty International has rightly condemned. Yes, those who recklessly invoke fatwas or call for ethno-religious jihads or outright ethnic fissures, secessions as

exemplified by numerous ethnic or religious militias should be treated as guilty of felonies rather than misdemeanors etc. The role of security agents in social conflict resolution comes into play here.

State Security Agencies and Social Conflicts

It can be theorized that the Nigeria's state security agencies are most of the times part of the problems rather than parts of the solution in effective conflict management, ethno-religiously, politically and socio-economically in all sense of the words. The Nigeria's state security agencies' unregulated, uncontrolled trigger-happiness and sadistic tendencies have been responsible for exacerbation of crises and conflicts in mostly tertiary institutions, labour unions and other strike actions targeted at labour and related socio-economic ameliorations or reforms desirable. Similarly, during elections, at the national, state and even local government levels, the Nigeria's state security agencies can rightly be often fingered as being manipulated, used, for the escalation or exacerbation of the electoral malpractices; the rigging, the carting away and stuffing of the ballot boxes and all that; being roundly responsible for most of the unfree and unfair elections throughout the country since 1980.

The alleged and identified corrupt practices in this regard are very well-known to alert Nigerians right from the 1980 and 1983 elections that saw the elections and reelections of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and his teams of NPN among others, respectively. Even in the freest and fairest of the 1993 general elections when the security agencies performed above board, attempts at rigging at all levels vis-à-vis the crises and conflicts thereof were mostly blamed on the security agencies. The memories of the so-called "Kill and Go", a name applied to Nigeria's mobile police force continue to ring bell right from 1980s to date. The recurrent issues of corruption among the security agencies, police, military and para-military forces are also very well known. Here, the famishing pays and poor remunerations of our hard-working security agencies, particularly, the police, military and para-military forces that make them easily susceptible to manipulation by the equally corrupt leadership prone to sit-tightism and the recommended solutions, often left unattended to, are also well-known and documented. The only way out of this malais is to adequately pay and compensate our undoubtedly hardworking security agencies across the boards, properly monitor and supervise them to gear them for proper performance in the discharge of their often onerous assignments in terms of crisis and conflict management. Those identified as so corrupted to have performed badly, falling foul of the laws should be roundly prosecuted along with their unpatriotic sponsors, no matter how highly placed. These are, no doubt, a few of the key measures that can go a long way to addressing the endemic problems that make the Nigeria's state security agencies more a collection of liability rather than asset in the Nigerian polity, civil or military. There is no question about it that they are generally a collection of very patriotic Nigerians, often fallen into systemic plagues to perform below standards, especially in national, state and local government assignments entrusted to them as crisis and conflict managers; rank, file and reservists. Their calls to duties at various international conflict or crisis management assignments have been generally very commendable. A lot more is still expected from them, nonetheless, taking into consideration, the key position of Nigeria as a pace setter in the comity of African nations.

The National Economic Crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria's economic crisis has long been implicated and complicated by the tangles of what is generally referred to as "the debt trap" "debt overhangs", and "National debt question", international and national politics, endemic

corruption, all in its procurement, accumulation and the improper management of same in our developmental dreams and drives. The issues surrounding our debts question, foreign and domestic are well-known among the intelligentsia. We may therefore need not dwell unduly here in highlighting it, as they continue to make screaming head-lines and discussions in our national dailies, weekly magazines and other media avenues. Our concern here, therefore, is to broach theoretical perspectives on our debt overhang as one of the endemic recurrent epicenters of the crises and conflicts in Nigeria. "Nigeria's debt burden", as recorded by Vincent Obia, "amounts to about US\$35 billion." The Debt Management Office says Nigeria still owes US\$25 billion to the Paris Club alone".

This is the country's largest creditor, despite paying out US\$42 billion over the past 38 years" (Sunday Independence, May 22, 2005: B10). In the words of the Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo - Iweala, "Nigeria owes US\$34 billion, much of it in penalties and compound interest imposed on debts that were not paid by the military dictatorships of the 1980s and early 1990s". According to her, we make annual debt repayments of more than US\$1.7billion, three times our educational budget and nine times our health budget". Canvassing for debt reprieve rather than outright repudiation as the National Assembly has desperately and futilely campaigned, Okonjo-Iweala asserts that only such reprieve would enable Africa meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)... "Much more meaningfully however, is the argument of the officials of the Paris Club and London Club of private lenders, all Nigeria's Creditors: "Nigeria is considered neither eligible for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - sponsored Highly Indebted poor countries scheme, nor the British initiated commission for Africa Project", being spiritedly championed by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Nigeria's weak-kneed and corruption-ridden attempts to address the debt trap from President Shehu Shagari's Austerity Measure" through General Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) all ended in smoke. All these measures like the current President Obasanjo's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) as we must all be reminded, were varied clones of the western creditors; each of which has produced more nightmares to Nigerians, than ever, as the looming specters of NEEDS, SEEDS AND LEEDS are likely to duplicate, perhaps, except more human-faced management approach is more altruistically adopted.

Instead of the ego-trip campaigns by the National Assembly for suicidal debt reputation, including Gamaliel Onosode's misleading assertion that "Nigeria is strong enough, big enough and desired enough to repudiate its debt", there are other viable and more reasonable management options the debt overhang can be productively addressed. Among such options are the possible, more creative methods of amortizing the principal, amounts borrowed from the varied clubs, plus convenient interests yearly. Radically, perhaps, the war against corruption can be made retrospective by aggressive legislation to recover most of the looted funds in foreign vaults, funds belonging to past and current corrupt public officials, estimated to reach over US\$170 billion dollars. Unquestionably, imprudent jamborees like the unproductive hosting of the COJAA (Confederation of Junior African Athletics Association) or Common Wealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the recent launching of Olusegun Obasanjo's Presidential Library, in which a whopping over N6.0 billion was netted at the spot through the flamboyant donations by both the private and public sectors of this famished Nigerian federation; rightly described by the Nobel Leasurete Wole Soyinka as, "executive extortionism", are bad adverts for debt remission. There is hardly any worse campaign against debt reprieve than these jamborees, talk

less of debt forgiveness or cancellation. What is more, the library's public relations jamboree, executive extortions from the Aso Rock's frontline contractors and the 36 state Governors from public funds appear to showcase a culmination of the window dressing called the ruling government's anti-corruption crusade and war against economic and financial crimes revolution.

It really has gone far to diminish Professor Febian Osuji's N55 million public relations fiasco that got him booted as minister, and the Senate President Adolphus Wabara sacked as Senate President. The Library when completed may become a candidate for confiscation by a courageous new government that comes, come 2007, suffering, deservingly, no doubt, the fate of the prestigious Sani Abacha Center built with no more than the infamous use of executive incumbency to perpetrate questionable public spiritedness so hoodwinked. This struggle should be so, all the more, considering that all Nigeria's institutional libraries, where such exist are in dire needs of facilities; books, computers, refreshment centers for the future Nigerians in need of 21st century-compliance know-how.

The spill overs of the economic mismanagement that characterizes foreign debt quagmire are epitomized by the continuous paralytic epileptic lack luster performance of the Nigerian Electricity Power Authority that provoked President Obasanjo to lament over it as a national embarrassment, thanks to the all-sectoral debilitations being caused by nationwide loadshedding debited to scarcity of gas at the Egbin and other power stations. The same lamentation reminds us of General Babangida's refrain at the peak of his military presidency in the 1990s to the effect that Nigeria's economy of which he was the chief executive and commander in chief defy miraculous understanding why it had not collapsed, as if his mission would have been better fulfilled, if Nigeria's economy would rather collapse under his dictatorial mismanagement.

This assertion is no less embarrassing and self-indicting than when Obasanjo lamented how N300 billion had gone to mismanagement and perhaps corruption cul de sac, when no good roads, but pot-holes and gallops have ridden the south-south and south-eastern roads particularly; when the former works and housing minister, Tony Aneni as works and Housing Minister was reigning supreme, as Obasanjo's "mister fix it". Such lackluster management pervades all crisis sectors: education, health, security, environment, agriculture, poverty alleviation, and then eradication programmes (NAPEP), Civil service, foreign missions, etc are all in sad and embarrassing states, unbefitting of the giant of Africa, described as "perpetually potentially rich" by one Dr. Agwu Ukiwe Okali (the Guardian 23/04/05: page B9). Each of these has degenerated to crisis proportions, generating conflict after conflict that need efficient rather than corrupt and ineffective management and leadership; spreading mass poverty, under employment, unemployment, child labour, human trafficking and new slavery, armed robberies, political and business-related assassinations, ethnic restiveness, environmental degradations, threatening let and let-live, and coexistential imperatives, among the business and socio-political classes. It is not far fetched to characterize the present Nigeria landscape from Kaura Namoda to Owerri, Ogoja to Kaduna or Calabar to Maidugri; South-south, South-east, North-central, North-west, North-east, North-west and South-west geopolitical regions as being full of injustices, unfair plays, failures of the rule of law, executive lawlessness, perversion of justice in favour of the rulers; in favour of the rich; at the expenses of the underprivileged masses and the ruled. Our streets are full of private wai-ruwas and maiguards, under aged boys and girls hunting for water from private bore-holes, charging cut-throat prices. Because government water corporations across the land from Aba to Abuja, Yala to Yola, Uyo to Ugep, Kano to

Kaduna, urban and suburban, have failed to deliver. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's refrain: "water, water everywhere! There is no drop to drink", could not be more meaningful to average Nigerian across the socio-cultural class spectrum; from the "Ivory Towers" turned "Towers of filths and rickety bronze"; it is the rule rather than the exception; these are metaphors for Nigeria's economic crisis. It is not an exaggeration to the majority of Nigerians to characterize it as "Nightmarish". Apart from the global system of mobile telecommunication (GSM) business that make fast business, reaping magabillion naira around the country, thanks to the new information and telecommunication revolution worldwide, business collapse; small-scale, medium-scale and most other business, including the banking sectors, except those who operate on money laundry and other sharp practices, are on their knees. We have reduced ourselves to "fetchers of water and hewers of wood", and our leaders through the ages, civil or military are more committed to perpetuating the stereotypes than making avoidable efforts to reorienting the status quo.

However, the greatest economic crisis and conflict management challenge facing Nigeria economically, socially and politically, is to try to meet up the demands of the Millennium Development (MDGS), already five year spent, appropriate inequity in the women question, environmental degradation, sanitation etc. by its terminal date of 2015. Capitalization, monetization, anticorruption crusade, NEEDS, NAPEP, INEC, ISEC, NPRC, PRONACO, as viable alternative to NPRC, innumerable tribal associations, ethno-religious associations, youth and adult restiveness? We can go on and on. Each of these that we must all give a chance to succeed is a reaction to the crises of economic reforms, as culminations of ripples of the crises of conflict management gone, in many ways, turpsy-turvey.

But Nigeria is full of hopes, because Nigerians are tough, for when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. So the tougher the going, most of the times, on average, the tougher becomes Nigerians' capacity to resist; not going down, but coping with stress and distress that come with the negative ripples of the conflicts of corrupt governance, misrule; crises of mismanagement of Nigeria's abundant resources; human, natural and materials. These phenomena justify the BBC's feature profile of Nigerians earlier as the happiest people on the face of the earth. The phenomenon of Nigerians' religiosity also has a lot to do with this characterization. Nigerians are also among the most religious people on earth. Yes, no doubt, whether as Christians; in the Christianity, as mushrooming innumerable in Nigeria, or as Moslims in their various sects, Nigerians can be rightly rated as among the most religious globally. Their closeness to God or Allah or traditional religions or both for that matter, and being able to pass Allah's test or God's test, in terms of loving one's neighbours as oneself and God above everything else could be a different Kettle of fish. We can, here again, go on and on. However, this quote from the Daily Independence Caption "The Nigerian child Today", (May 27, 2005: page C4) graphically captures the grim scenario in the country in terms of crisis of economic management, as the benchmark for all aspects of Nigerian life, as forecast for the future:

Very poor mentoring environment subsists in the nation, and the Nigerian Child can hardly call up a handful of models for emulation. What really can the growing child learn from the brazen thievery and primitive accumulation that distinguish the average Nigerian public office holder, or the massive rigging of elections which has become the distinguishing character of our electoral system? Many Children are still denied access to basic education in Nigeria, and

child labour thrives unabashedly in our rural and urban centers.

Meanwhile, the United State's National Intelligence Council document titled "Mapping Sub-Saharan Africa's Future", had predicted outright failure of Nigeria state within the next 15 years, has alarmed us as follows:

While currently Nigeria's leaders are locked in a bad marriage that all dislike but dare not leave, there are possibilities that could disrupt the precarious equilibrium in Abuja".

Described by president Obasanjo as a doomsday scenario, the report stresses:

The major import would be a junior officer coup that could destabilize the country to the extent that open warfare breaks out in many places in a sustained manner. If Nigeria were to become a failed state, it could drag down a large part of the West African region... (Daily Independence, 27th May 2005, page C5).

President Obasanjo's tirade and diatribe on this warning, seen by many well-meaning Nigerians as appropriate is expectedly propagandistic and arrogantly rebuking, rebuffish and stand-offish. This paper regards that forecast as being quite friendly on the part of the United States, for to be FOREWARNED is to be FOREARMED. But not surprising, our senate, as reported in The Guardian frontpage caption, "Senate condemns American report on Nigeria", the distinguished, rubber stamping Senators unanimously, in a purile assertion, regarded the warning as "another attempt by the U.S. to undermine the progress being recorded by Nigeria in its reform programme", (Guardian: May 27th, 2005, pages 1 – 2).

They parrot our amiable president as they had done earlier over the transparency International assessment of Nigeria, on the corruption perception Index, as the most corrupt, after Bangladesh and Cameroon, perhaps. Similar condemnations, no doubt, can be expected from Lower House, may be less purile, and most likely also from the chorus of the innumerable hordes of Aso Rock's sychophants, propagandists and perfidious image laundry experts etc. However, "Nigeria will survive", as the irrepressible Sunny Okosun had chanted long ago. It is along that line of survivalist hope that the American report can be regarded as friendly and positive.

Language, Communication and Conflicts

In an unpublished lecture, this writer had stated elaboratory, inter alia, that "language and communication, verbal or non-verbal can be regarded as Siamese twins, the separation of which cannot be effected without some relative damage to one or both. This, in essence is the paradigm of human communication in all its dynamism, as a mediation in the co-existential imperatives among humans". In this regard, language and communication can be manipulated to control events. They can be used to mollify crisis situation, with a view to resolving or neutralizing conflict situation or vice versa. The twin medium can also be used to inflame crisis or conflict situation, to cause dissension, discontent, disorientation, agitation or disstabilization of an otherwise quiet atmosphere and disposition characteristic of peace and concord". The piece roundly concluded here that, "this is a paradox of language and communication, as a double-edged sword, in that, they can mould or shape for good, as well as cut to destroy" (Iji: "Language and Communication in Peace and Conflict Resolution" 2002).

At this juncture, further elaboration on the essence of conflict can be effected in addition to earlier definition broached. In the words of Marc Howard Ross (1993: 1 – 2) "Conflict is about the concrete interests adversaries pursue, and at the same time, about their Interpretations of what is at stake". "Conflict", he says, "becomes intense not just because of the value of what is being fought over but because of the psychological importance of the winning and losing". Rationalizing the paradoxes of conflict as intimate companion to peace, Martin Luther King (Junior) asserts (1963) that: "life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony". This is an intense expression of the inevitability of conflict as a sweetener to savour the imperative need, desirability and urgency for peace and concords among human family in particular and animals in general. In other words, conflicts can fuel positive development as well as impede it, with the former coming perhaps only after a certain degree of reconciliation of the contradictory forces implied. In this regard, we may argue that dialogue communication, is intricately linked, as two sides of a triangle, completed by conflict or violence as an incompartmentable aspect of the unavoidable coordinates, giving birth to peace paradoxically. In many instances, the world may resort to violence, violence and again violence as language and communication to address conflicts as opposed to dialogue, dialogue and then dialogue to tackle same, as operable alternative to resolve conflicts of interests.

Paradoxically, those who resort to the former alternative believe that it is a practicable avenue to facilitate the latter, which can be taken for granted as a sign of mutual weaknesses of the opposing sides. In the cold war language and communication between the former superpowers, United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union (USSR), for instance, the ideology of confrontation was coded in the assertion that those who need peace must prepare for war, as exemplified by the piling up of war chest or armories of various mass destructive intensities. It is remarkable to note that peace talks of various kinds are resorted to, to resolve conflicts, should wiser humans to go the extra miles, in the pursuit of peace, exhausting all possible avenues for dialogue before ever resorting to violence, as degeneration of conflicts, or last resort unavoidably. In this regard, Winston Churchill's advice and assertion that jaw – jaw rather than war – war in the resolution of conflict comes in as the most civilizing and post prudent form of language and communication in addressing conflicts of any sort. Similarly, the two sides in any conflicts, disputes or crises must always be mindful of their utterances and mode of communication of their passions and perspectives in addressing or contributing to related issues. Thus language and communication that enhance resolution rather than inflame conflicts should be the operational rule of thumb. For instance, bellicose and belligerent language like those used in our various ethno-religious, inter-tribal, or other dispute avenues in communicating their grievances must be religiously avoided or minimized, no matter the rage, frustrations, provocations or cause of conflicts. Such language and modes of communication often tend to fuel cycles of conflicts and violation of human mutual respects, peace-courting, civilized language and communication of same as integral aspect of conflict management. They should not be construed as a sign of weakness or compromise. Such peace-nurturing and conflict-prevention or mollification measures can provide sound moral foundation that could guarantee John F. Kennedy's advice that, "mankind must put an end to conflicts of whatever nature or conflicts will put an end to mankind". In other words, Lyndon B. Johnson was absolutely right when he asserted that, "The guns and bombs, the rockets and warships", that cause so much destruction and developmental impediments are nothing, "but symbols of human failures", and

as a result, they are also symbols of human moral weakness, degeneration and coexistential intolerance.

In terms of conflict configurations or categories, which I call "conflict stimulants and epicenters", (Ross (1993) distinguishes between two main classes of conflict zones: He calls it "Low" and "High" zones of conflicts. High conflict zones include regions, countries or communities in which the culture of conflicts has become virtually entrenched as an organ or instrument of state policy. Here the popularity or otherwise of governance in such zones are dependent on the skills, statecrafts manipulated to honestly or pretentiously manage, regulate and sustain the conflict tempos, rhythms and orchestra. Here people who gain by conflicts hardly ever work towards resolution of such conflicts, since their livelihood may more or less depend on the prolongation of same. Stoking the embers of conflicts so as to try to manage them as sustainable business become a craft.

This phenomenon has been graphically stated by Ross (1993: 1 – 2) when he asserts: "Conflict management becomes a tool of the privileged, used to maintain their privileged positions, leaving the less-favoured the unsettling choice between acquiescence, and costly often destructive action". In the words of Ross, such conflicts have complex social and political colourations that make them difficult to manage or resolve effectively. Countries such as Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Togo, Arab-Isreali zone, Pakistan, India, Lebanon among others fall into this category. Nearer home, there are also hot beds of ethno-religious conflicts, undoubtedly, such as Kano, Kaduna; Niger Delta, with its recurrent youth restiveness etc. all fall into high zones of conflicts in Nigeria. Low conflict zones, as the name implies mean just that, the recurrence of conflicts here are not tinder-box as applicable to the High Conflicts hot-beds profiled.

Land As Emotive Conflict Dynamics

Land-based causes of conflict, which may be socio-political, often carry psycho-cultural implications that are rather difficult to resolve, and manipulated by conflict-barons or warlords to sustain their separate ambitions, using innocent, helpless segments of the population as fodder. Complicated also by ethno-religious configurations, the Arab-Isreali conflicts belong to this typology, and can hardly be resolved despite all the efforts, realistic or unrealistic exerted to tackle them. Among the reasons for the endemic nature of the recurrent cycles of violence; physical, cultural and psycho-cultural, that characterize this epicenter of conflicts vis-à-vis their apparent endlessness is the inherent management approach towards permanent resolution desired. Neither have the Arabs, the Isrealis nor the super-powers to whom either of them have often used as surrogates been honest enough in helping to resolve the conflict issues successfully, and can hardly ever do, except very drastic measures, predicated on live and let live or culture of sacrifice are faithfully exerted towards sustainable peace. The reciprocal language applied to address the issues are never conducive to peace nor conflict resolution. Until the issues of permanent independent homeland for the Arabs or Palestinians vis-à-vis the emotive religious shrines, particularly the Jerusalem question are honestly, amicably and realistically resolved, the inherent cycles of conflicts and violence or riots they generate can hardly, ever, be resolved to the benefits of the two different socio-cultural, socio-political, and ethno-religious configurations. This can be characterized as a cross-cultural dimension of conflicts. The resolution of such conflicts is predicated on imbibing the culture of tolerance, philosophical adjustments, or cross-cultural re-orientation, and other legitimate dialogue approaches, shunning or minimizing violence as much as possible.

Inclusive Temperaments

It is not far-fetched to assert that high conflict propensities are generally associated with areas or communities that are emotionally unstable, not well-developed and lack psycho-social or psycho-cultural exposures. A people with collective psycho-cultural temperatmentality are quick tempered, erratic, maladjusted and quick to react to situations, especially, under pressure. It may have nothing to do with the degree of economic developments and their indices, as manifest in greater rates of suicides, divorces and other such indicators of short-temperedness in the developed economies than in the less-developed. For instance, people in the Asiatic countries are more prone to suicides, and the French or Americans, more prone to divorce than Nigerians or Ghanains, respectively; all of which are indicators of emotional deficiencies; psychological and cultural conflict-phenomena not easily resolvable. Such isolated, piecemeal manifestations of conflicts may fall under the category of low conflicts zones than others, no matter how pervasive such phenomena may occur. Similarly, the conflicts that accompany certain developmental phenomena such as globalization, liberalization and the resultant international trade imbalances and contradictory protectionism, labour issues etc., that accompany such policies, ideological or otherwise, have often tended to generate short-termed conflicts. Such conflicts that erupted in Italy, USA, or Kyoto, Japan, Genoa (Italy), in reactions to globalization and depletion of the ozone layers and other environmental devastations, arguably fall into low conflict typology. The resolution of this can be easily effected through conscious dialogues as they are often maturely prosecuted.

Religious Phenomena

Religion, one of the most personal, but emotive phenomena is another area that generates the most pervasive conflicts, the resolution of which can hardly be effected durably. Examples of this abound, inherently, in the recurrent cycles of the Arab-Israeli question. The Balkans question that overflowed in the break-up of Yugoslavia, and even the former Soviet Union, with their smothering after-shocks, continues to leave tales of woes, the resolution of which can be hardly predicted. Nearer home, the Sharia question in the federation is another area of potential trouble flash-points that Nigeria has, so far, handled with political dexterity. It is difficult to assert now as to whether it is the political or legal language that can control it more effectively and more durably. The Indian and Pakistani sub-continent, with their multi-religious Hinduism, Confucianism, etc.; Afghanistan, with mainly Sunnite Moslems majority, whose coexistence with the minority Shitte Moslems, on the one hand and Hinduism on the other, have continued to be flash-points and epicenters of religious conflicts. Such religio-political subtleties seem to have entangled the ruling Taliban with Bin Laden/terrorism, and which, at the end of the day, culminated in the US bombing of the war-torn Afghanistan. Peaceful coexistence thus continues to be elusive because of religious fundamentalism and the propensity to language of violence, as their first and last resorts in conflicts resolution. Good neighbourliness, and other peaceful coexistential imperatives are a language that is beyond the comprehension of extremists, and therefore the continuous developmental deficits as part of their evolving culture.

Management of Poverty

Though undisciplined management of riches could create or generate its own conflicts and crisis situations, there is hardly any doubt that poverty generally creates, stimulates and fuels a culture of conflicts that may or may not be quite easily resolved, depending on the remote or immediate causes

of disputations vis-à-vis the medium of mediation. The peasant-oriented conflicts and riots that raged sometimes in Nasarawa State as a result of the slaughter of Shaiki Azara, Musa Mohammed, and his team, have both ethnic and religious causes, remote and immediate, though predicated on the recurrent and land question, between the Tivs of Benue State and their host (Hausa) community in Nasarawa etc. It is possible that the rich are manipulating the poor to prosecute their cause, which may not yet have been easily established. The fact that modern, sophisticated weaponry are being used may indicate that the frustrations, distress and other indices of poverty are being taken advantage of in the conflict. The same phenomena may be applicable to the other conflicts flash-points in the country, namely the endemic and prolonged Ife-Modakeke imbroglio, the Aguleri-Umuleria/Anam. The Ogoni case has been classic in its own endemic question of extreme human rights violation by Shell and other multinational oil companies, thanks to persistent environmental degradation, oils pillage vis-à-vis the destruction of the Ogoni and other township, with its inhabitants. This was a most heinous crime against humanity, ordered by a government elected to protect human lives and human rights; a conflict resolution approach that has substantially downgraded, avoidably, Nigeria's democratic polity. A caring and civilized government should empower its citizenry towards alleviating and eliminating poverty rather than allying with greedy multinationals, corrupt government officials, and traditional rulers, to accelerate deprivation and extreme poverty among its people, resulting in cycles of conflicts, riots, violence and destruction, the resolutions of which can hardly endure.

The Odi conflict and its resolution have become an indelible tragic metaphor symptomatic of the legacy of militaristic, brutish and brutal command culture, a very dark chapter in Nigerian democratic polity. The Hitlerian destructive sacking of Odi, represented a Vietnamisation of a Nigerian community by a civilian commander-in-chief, outstripping even the worst riot or conflict crimes perpetrated by the most brutish Nigeria military, as an instrument of restoring peace. It was a thoughtless, callous devastation of a ravaged community. No condemnation of this reprisal or revenge destruction of Odi can be loud or harsh enough, especially when targeted at curtailing or preventing its repetition in future, in any other similar crises. The Plateau state vis-à-vis the Katsina-Ala eruptions, the killings, reprisals and the management here were equally indictable.

Communication Gap

As adequately established in the foregoing, "conflicts", in the words of Ross (1993, p. 17), "are rooted in differences, both in interests and participants' interpretations of events and other actors". "Conflicts are threats to shared or collective value", it has been affirmed. It is also a form of social communication, a language of dissent or discord. It could also represent an interpretation of intended and unintended meanings, perhaps, a cross-cultural mediation of accidental communication gaps. In resolving such conflicts, there must be therefore, cross-cultural, and psychocultural, among other avenues that may impact on the possibility of successful conflict management towards a durable resolution or otherwise.

Culture Tolerance

"Peace", as Dr. Joseph Wayas second Republic Senate President, asserted once, "is required for progress. Peace is needed for sustainable development", he said, "Mankind", he said, "must sacrifice their perspective and collective egos or pride towards peaceful coexistence". In this regard, therefore, no price is too much to pay to live in peace at all levels of human coexistence, even with one's enemies,

through the philosophy of tolerance of other's different behavioural ethos. However, when conflicts arise or erupt as inevitable co-existential imperatives, in any form, their successful management, in terms of resolution, becomes a challenge, a test of maturity, spiritual, mental, emotional and psychological co-ordination. Conflict resolution language and communication must be predicated, first and foremost, on dialogue, dialogue and dialogue. Violence must only come, then, as the last resort, but then again, dialogue is still the only realistic and most durable avenue designated variously in forms of arbitration, adjudication or litigation and other forms of adjustments. These are the most inescapable and irreducible mediation metaphors for the most durable and most sustainable peace yet available for humans. Reducing the gaps between the rich and poor is also an irreducible metaphor towards peaceful coexistence. Thus in the case of poverty alleviation or eradication, any purposeful governance must faithfully prosecute its various implementation avenues to solidly construct such bridges, towards redressing human co-existential contradictions, represented by poverty in the midst of plenty. Trouble-shooting language and communication are two irreducible sine qua non, again in this regard, and must be fervently, religiously and dedicatedly managed or manipulated, avoiding likely indelible insults etc.

The Media as the Message

In all, believing religiously that the media is the message, always, because of power of information and its proper dissemination through the instrumentality, humans must constantly try to use them constructively in all forms; to propagate and promote peace and peaceful coexistence among people, using "live-and-let-live" rather than "live-and-let-die" metaphors prevalent in our world. There is no better avenue in the cumulative language and communication in peace and conflicts resolution. If the avenues of minimizing, curtailing or preventing conflicts, as well as measures suggested, broached and pontificated on, here, are faithfully imbibed, adhered to and practiced, there is no question that the world would be the better for humans coexistential unavoidability, and plausible or possible conflicts inevitability. Yes, conflicts must always arise as a result of human dynamism in crisis-cross of interactions. But when they do occur managing them resourcefully is a test of maturity, test of individual or collective character.

CONCLUSION

The above discourse represents a core of the salient issues on Theoretical Perspectives on Conflicts. The perspectives broached on can adequately provide foundation for broader discourse or arguments for highlighting a number of recurrent contentious issues on Nigerian polity, socio-cultural, socio-economic and psycho-social or political, that we generally refer to as the Nigeria's National Question, the Achilles heel of our developmental imperatives. The solutions to this heel would go a long way towards guaranteeing sustainable Nigeria's geopolitical cohesion, ethno-religious harmony, effective socio-economic management, psychosocial balance and cultural equilibrium for the benefits of the greatest number of Nigerian citizens. Such theoretical backgrounds or perspectives can be used to discuss Media and Conflicts in Nigeria, Federalism and the National Question and conflicts in Nigeria, Gender and Conflicts in Nigeria, Democratization and Conflicts in Nigeria, International Dimension of social Conflicts and Crisis Management in Nigeria, respectively. All those are leading sub themes in this key national conference, at this crucial period in Nigeria history when we strongly believe that dialogues constitute, very valid approaches to effective therapeutic diagnosis of Nigeria's endemic malaise, hinged on

corrupt and ineffective leadership, cycles of military coups d'etats and civil-military dictatorships and sit-tightism vis-à-vis elections malpractices of all designations.

Each of these sub themes, in many instances, constitutes high conflicts ingredients and divisive factors in Nigeria's socio-polity and socio-economic parameters, especially through the instrumentality of inefficient, visionless, trial and error, groping-in-the-dark, myopic, greedy, winners take-all syndrome that characterize, so far, Nigeria's styles of governance; military or civilians. The authoritarianism that has been the hall mark of governance, acquired from military arrogance cum vanity has deeply entrenched and sophisticated corruption in all senses of the word. Executive lawlessness, extortionist tendencies in various dimensions, strangulation of the middle classes and the filthy rich getting richer, through prebendal and clientele culture of grafts, courtesy of ingrained sycophancy and bootlicking as a form of reciprocal patronage which are favorable ingredients of stage crafts, at the expense of effective, efficient and potent intellectual inputs that could guarantee visionful and positively directional and futuristic leaderships. The kind of leadership that Nigeria, so richly endowed, in terms of both human and materials resources deserves is one that is ever-performing, altruistically, for the greatest good of the greatest number of deserving Nigerians, irrespective of tenet, tongue or tribe. It is through such avenues and approaches that Nigeria can effectively redress the conflictual paradoxes of absolute poverty in the midst of filthy wealth, accumulated mostly through grafts, treasury looting, embezzlements of public funds, misappropriations from the tax-payers tilts among other corrupt practices that characterize public office in our beloved, richly God-favored country Nigeria. These are among the avenues that the core Nigeria's National Questions can be safeguarded against the recurrent cycles of crises and conflicts that undermine Nigeria's developmental impetus and progress.

Unquestionably, theoretical perspectives are the powerhouse, lodestone, treasure vault or concrete pillars, and thus the catalysts for stimulation of inspirational ideas that provide solid German foundation and litmus test for practical solutions, through experimentations and experiments. They can concretize lasting inventions, discoveries and other achievements, not only in arts or sciences but also in all fields of human endeavors; durable breakthroughs, technologically, ideologically and philosophically, all through the ages, helping to provide appropriate solutions to crises provoked by man's inherent and avoidable frailties.

In all, as an update, Nigeria has been granted debt reprieve; call it debt pardon, debt forgiveness, debt buy back, debt swap and debt reenslavement or debt recolonization; economically and politically, and one would not be quite wrong. It is a reprieve exacted at a very high price, where Nigeria and Nigerians are put at the negative receiving end. It is likely to prove the sense of *déjà vu*, that ordinary Nigerians had and have seen before, several times; from all the Nigerian Kleptomaniac leadership since 1980; through president Shehu Shagari, Generals Babangida, Abacha, Abdulsalami Abubakar to Chief Obasanjo. The debt reprieve may turn out to be Nigeria's Trojan Horse. Only time shall tell.

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