



**Role of Older Persons in Conflict Resolution and
Development: An Analysis of Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds***

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Abstract

Forage into literature has proved the inevitability of conflict within the human society while unresolved conflict leads to chaos and eventually, underdevelopment which is owing to the fact that no meaningful development can take place in a crisis-ridden situation. Hence, the human society has over the last six decades been finding means of conflict resolution so as to forestall chaos and unrest of any kind in the society. This is one of the core reasons for the establishment of international organizations such as United Nations and African Union; all in the effort to promote peace; a necessary constituent of democracy and development. In view of the fact that conflict is unavoidable, it becomes imperative to view concept of conflict and development and their antecedents from the perspective of African culture. Therefore, this paper, using Elechi Amadi's novel, *The Great Ponds*, brought to the fore the complexes, dynamics, and

consequences of conflict within the society and the role of older persons on issues of conflict resolution, democracy and development within indigenous African society. The paper highlights cultural roles of older persons in enhancement of peace and development within the precinct of African culture.

Introduction

Conflict is permanent features of human society. Historically, human beings have always got reasons to disagree with one another and even in agreement, there are differences in perspectives owing to diverse affiliations such as religion, nationality, race, ethnicity, political, economic and individual interest. Invariably, family which constitutes one of the agents of socialization process of a normal individual, influences attitude, opinion and eventually determines individual behaviour that may be at variance with others which can lead to conflict.

Also individual differences that lead to conflict, probably, has its root in conception, as deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of two individuals from scientific perspectives is not exact. Even from the Biblical account of creation story, there was conflict from the beginning as Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in disagreement to God's instruction Genesis:3;17. The scenario depicts the fact that human differences are natural and disagreement is bound to occur. Therefore, conflict is an issue of natural occurrence that is promoted by personal interest. Apart from personal, religious and issues, such as human behaviour, pride, ego, economic and political interests are breeding grounds for conflict among individuals. It is the inevitability of conflict that has made various means of conflict resolution such as Public Complaints Commission (ombudsman) an integral part of human society.

The origin of United Nations is rooted in conflict resolution though the United Nations on a number of occasions such as the first Gulf War in 1991 failed to prevent war but it had done a lot to resolve issues such as the end of civil war in Sudan. The United Nations was organized to resolve crisis so as to prevent exacerbating occurrences such as the Second World War. This is because viewing conflict from the position of World Book Encyclopedia (2008), conflict is bound to occur when interests of individuals, groups or nations are at variant with that of others. Therefore, since interest of individuals, communities and nations are bound to differ, conflict cannot be avoided but can only be addressed. This is because there can be no development in the presence of conflict and conflict is inevitable. Hence, there is the need to always find means of addressing conflict.

In view of this development, this paper brought to the fore the concept of conflict and its devastating effect within the frame work of indigenous African conflict resolution mechanism and the role of older persons in engaging challenges of conflict that predates the advent of colonialism using Elechi Amadi' *The Great Pond* (African Writers Series 3). This is because *The Great Pond* expatiates further on the composite nature of conflict such as sources, consummation and devastating effect on the people of Aliakoro and Chiolu over the Pond of Wagaba and the integral role of older persons played in ensuring peace.

Therefore, this paper presents the issues of conflict as it relate to effect and older persons concerns in conflict resolution.

The Concept of Conflict on Development

This segment of the paper expatiates on issues as they relate to conflict from scholars' perspective and with linking such

submission to occurrences in *The Great Ponds*. From forage into literature, conflict has to do with tension and clash of interest in relation to individuals, groups and national differences. Conflict from the forage into literature and submission of scholars such as Adegbola (2013), it can be deduced that conflict such as in the novel *Great Ponds* is a form of struggle between individuals or groups. It occurs whenever individual or group seeks to gain reward not by competition but by prevention of the other groups from competing. This is the occasion when the people of Chiolu prevented the people of Aliakoro from fishing in the pond of Wagaba. This is because human beings living together in a community are bound to differ, get desperate and hinge on violence on issues that relate to their survival such as economic factors.

In this instance, conflict occurs when source of livelihood is being threatened owing to this, individuals, ethnic groups, communities and even nations have had conflict among themselves which have resulted to war in order to protect economic interest. In some instances, most of such conflicts that have resulted to war, usually have to do with the control of natural resources. This is because such control is pertinent to economic survival and development in general. From the *Great Ponds*, it was deduced that the economic interest as it relates to resource control prompted the conflict between Chiolu and Aliakoro village of the Erekwu clan. The ponds were many but the source of conflict in this instance is the Pond of Wagaba which was described as 'remarkable rich ponds which their neighbour coveted and ravaged when they could' pg10.

Furthermore, it was described as unique; one of the poachers of Aliakoro described it 'I have never seen a pond so full of fish' pg12. So important to the two communities that they went to war after the conflict could not

be resolved. The great ponds were shared by many villages but Chiolu had the pond of Wagaba described as ' Pond of Wagaba which..... is rich in fish'pg8. From the submission above, it can be deduced that economic factor was the major source of conflict between the villages of Chiolu and Aliakoro.

Besides, nationalism can also fuel conflict; nationalism can be a source of conflict. From the position of Coleman and Cressy (1999), nationalism is a sense of identification with devotion to One's nation. Such devotion can lead to conflict owing to pride of being member of a nation that is rooted in the devotion to one's nation. It is a form of pride perhaps inordinate. It can lead to sense of imperialism in which an individual or group of people desire and actually expanded their geographical territory, social dominance and economic empire. This scenario did play out in the conflict between Chiolu and Alaikoro villages. The leaders of the two villages did claim the disputed pond of Wagaba. Eze Okechi commented on issues of fishing which was the major cause of the crisis. He commented '.....if they fish in the Pond of Wgaba they have right to'pg.21. While Eze Daili in reaction to the address '....we won this battle and this pond became ours...'pg23.Thus, from the declaration of the heads of the villages in conflict, identification and devotion to their respective villages did entrench the conflict.. From the submission above, it was a duty to their nation to claim the Pond of Wagabas.

In sum, the need for resource control (fish in the Pond of Wagaba) is the root cause of the conflict. Meanwhile,

nationalism is the pride, love and devotion to one's nation which have been identified from the position of this paper as causal factors for conflict. From the position, and owing to the propensity of conflict to bring chaos, it can be deduced that conflict has to do with opposition, resistance and coercion. The process of conflict involves the deliberate attempt to weaken and if possible, eliminates the opposition. The tool in achieving such by conflict is the use of violence. From deduction into *The Great Ponds*, violence is widely employed and elimination of individuals was paramount. After the first encounter, seventeen men died; four from Chiolu and thirteen from Aliakoro. Incidence such as this indicates that conflict reduces human resource which is a major tool for development. Omotayo (2001) identified two resources in any human endeavour; these are, thus, material and human resources. Grhem and Bennet (1998), described human resources as the human side of the management enterprise. Suffice to say, human resource is very crucial to the success of any human endeavour. According to Akintayo (1996), human resource is the lifewire of any enterprise. Consequently, it is an integral part of production because it is the only resource that is conscious of its contribution to production. Therefore, since conflict does not enhance but insalubrious human resource, it becomes imperative to ensure reduction of conflict. This is because without human resource to drive material resource, there can be no development. The concept of development in this instance relates to income and wellbeing of individuals.

Development from the position of this paper does not relate to economic status of countries as in the terms of developed, developing and underdeveloped nation. But a rudimentary definition that allows freedom and security for people within a community to fully express their potentials without fear of restriction, oppression, domination, coercion and insecurity. An enabling environment creating opportunities and capacity

to engage challenges as they emerge from time to time. The argument is that development cannot be practised within the quagmire of conflict. This is because the effect of conflict is devastating and inimical to development. The effect in the *The Great Pond* was, thus, captured:

.....fight assume alarming dimension.....life
became a nightmare.....farms were deserted...
enemies looted their yam and cut down
barns....Starvation was not along way
off..pg76

The above scenario described the effect of conflict on access to material resources of a community with the ultimate calamity of starvation that will eventually lead to extinction of the entire human community. In the ensuing war, there was depreciation in social activity owing to insecurity. It affects the homes; women cannot cook good food for their family since the farm cannot be assessed by a woman that ventures on farmshe never came back pg77. The situation was so pathetic that entire community was affected.

And so man, beast and crops suffered.
it was a long war a bitter war a
war of attrition .pg77

The scenario above brought to cognizance the devastating effect of conflict as it causes social and economic dislocation, even to people that are not directly involved .

The war grew so bitter that eventually
villages as far away as two days journey
began to feel the effect pg78

Hence, since conflict and its dynamics is generic, they cut across all strata of the society and, thus, hinders development and wellbeing of the people. Therefore, since welfare of the people can only thrive in an atmosphere of peace devoid of conflict, it becomes imperative to seek resolution to conflict. Thus, the next segment of the paper expatiates on older persons' role in conflict resolution between the people of Chiolu and Aliakoro.

Theoretical Perspective

Generally, theories explain facts that have been observed over time and theories give direction to a study. Hence, this paper brought to the fore relevant theory in social gerontology that supports the paper. This ensures a better understanding of the role of older persons in conflict resolution.

It can be deduced from the submission of Cumming and Henry (1961), disengagement theory explains the concept of age and its antecedent of reduction in agility as situations that warrants the need for older persons to disengage from the main social activity. In this paper, the disengagement theory explains reasons for non-participation of older persons in the actual fight for the Pond of Wagaba between Chiolu and Aliakoro. But, older persons are involved in peace negotiation that is less energy demanding. In this instance, the activity theory by Havighurist (1968), becomes relevant in explaining how older persons in the two villages remain relevant in their communities by assuming new role of mediation in ensuring peace in the two community.

The position of this paper is that dislocation of older persons from societal activity such as war is owing to age that reduces human agility; but it is not tantamount to redundancy in African society. Therefore, older persons remain socially-

relevant in African society by playing the cerebral role of peace mediation as the fulcrum of development and as argued in this paper .

Older Persons Role in Conflict Resolution

The previous segment of this paper has identified the nature of conflict, being inimical to development. Consequently, it becomes imperative to ensure conflict resolution, which is the major focus of this paper. The first role of the elders in conflict resolution is mediation between the warring communities. It was the elders of Erekwiland that mediate between Chiolu and Aliakoro. It was captured as 'assembly of old and venerable Ezes' pg.83 that gathered to resolve the crisis after all attempts have failed. The description was; 'Each village made it clear that she would not let the pond go'. However, because of respect for older persons they allowed for mediation .The arbitrators were all from the Erekwiland; it was, thus, captured 'Ezes of the Erekwiland have assembled together for the first time ever 'pg84. From the above submission, it shows how much the older persons appreciate peace for the first time ever the older persons gather all because of peace. Furthermore, not just any elders but those with credibility as it was described - 'Elders noted for their impartiality in their various villages were chosen' pg.79. The older persons serve as arbitrators in resolving peace. In resolving peace, the elders follow consultation in which they allowed all parties in the conflict to present their case. The consultation was thorough and open. It was narrated as:

The warring villages stated their case quoting ancient history which none but the very old could grasp. Pg. 83.

From this perspective, the older persons are presented as custodian of history and information and cogent arbitrators who thrives on fact and information. It gives credence to older persons as set of population group that readily admits limitations. 'Time obscures many things, but time also establishes many things pg. 87. In this instance, the older persons admit their limitations in recounting history in actual detail. Such sincerity is further embellishes in choosing older persons that will mediate in the crisis. Actual visit was made to the pond to ensure equity. Here, it was described as 'ponds were carefully inspected' pg. 84. After much deliberation, there was no conclusion except the option of metaphysical that involves swearing with a deadly god, Ogbunabali.

The admittance of failure in ensuring resolution in the conflict by the older persons is an act of courage, candour, sincerity, humility and authority. Here, the older persons admit that they can no longer solve the crisis after so many options were considered. Then, the god, Ogbunabali was used as the final arbiter; this shows that before the advent of law court and international arbitration mechanism such as the United Nations, the indigenous Africans communities have means of settling disputes among communities .The first is to call the older persons and after such intervention, there was no resolution, the next thing is to call the gods just as it occurred in *The Great Ponds*.

The authority of older persons in this era is paramount. It was made known to the two villages that the decision on the pond will be decided by the older persons- 'that will be decided by elders of the Erekwí clan'pg.82. In furtherance of the older persons authority and control over their clan, it was made known to the two communities that the words of the older persons are laws -'Ezes are not to be trifled with'pg.84. The essence of the respect for the Ezes was a derivative from their

bravery candour, sincerity, control humility and authority. These are attributes that ensure acceptability of the Ezes decision that the two villages of Chiolu and Aliakoro agreed to swear by the deadly god Ogbunabali. At the end, resolutions of the elders were followed and peace was achieved.

Conclusion

The entire book *The Great Ponds* was a compendium of crisis resolution among communities in an indigenous African society before the advent of colonialism. The deduction from the position of this paper is that crisis is inevitable and it can be controlled even when human solution seems impossible; hence the god Ogbunabali was consulted through which the oath was sworn. The paper has established a major fact that older persons are ready to ensure peace, even at the cost of losing their lives. In variance to the older persons, the younger generation admitted- 'I am mainly responsible for the war of the great ponds'.pg113. From this assertion, the older persons despite the love and nationalist tendency still want peace to resolve the crisis. It got to a stage the oldest person in Alaikoro commented 'If only my death would end the war I should be too happy to die. Pg.81.This statement shows how much older persons are committed to peace and development, even, to the point of death. The book also presents older persons as caring and sensitive set of people; prisoners were called sons. The Eze of Chiolu commented when interrogating prisoner from Aliakoro 'what is your name, my son'pg.16. Here, prisoners were well treated by older persons all in the pursuit of peace. Another attribute of the older persons in conflict resolution is sincerity. The Ezes of Isiali admitted the fact that he took sides with Aliakoro village at the initial stage of the war ...but the truth shines like the moon and must be said – that we lent warrior to Aliakoropg79.

This scenario presented the older persons as truthful and sincere and was committed to peace at all cost. Besides, the leadership quality of the older persons is of great importance. They serve their community selflessly and do not arrogate undue privileges and control; here respect is earned and not demanded. The older person who led Chiolu was described as:

Eze Diali influence permeated the whole village like the cult of Amadioha men stopped fighting and women ceased verbal exchanges at his intercession He did not interfere in his neighbour affairs he did not order anyone around he worked as hard as anyone else..... Daili subtle leadership was indispensable to Chiolu..... Leadership that defied imitation , an inborn leadership whose incredible strength lay in its gentleness.pg19.

From the above submission, such leadership by older persons ensures the resolution of the crisis in which the resolution of the crisis justified Chiolu. Finally, the conflict resolution and development capability of the older persons is entrenched in the words of older persons to the younger generation.

.... In our days we the elders fought to pass on the heritage of the Great Ponds to you .Now it is your turn to defend this heritagepg 60

From this perspective, the heritage here refers to openness, sincerity, humility, tact knowledge, truthfulness and selflessness that have established older persons as epitome of development. It is this attribute that has made older persons an indispensable constituent of humanity in general and that of indigenous African society in particular.

Recommendations

- (1) Any form of crisis or misunderstanding should be timely addressed and resolved before it degenerates into chaos and conflict; mediation should be prompt.
- (2) In conflict resolution, arbitrators should have integrity in order to build confidence within the parties in conflict.
- (3) In conflict resolution, there should be display of courage, sincerity humility and equity.
- (4) Further research should be done on other literature text so as to bring values of Africinity.

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