The Natioral World and Violent Conflict in Nigeria: An Appraisal

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Abstract

Nigeria is plagued by various kinds of violent conflicts. These conflicts include ethnic, religious, social, economic, political, and many other forms of conflicts. Violent conflicts in Nigeria have remained unabated. Violent conflicts have many consequences in Nigeria. But very often the consequences on the environment are ignored as if the natural world does not matter. This paper using an analytic method argues that it is not enough to take the social consequences of violent conflicts into consideration. Their impact on the environment should be taken into consideration. If this is not done conflicts in Nigeria will remain unabated. It is imperative to taken nature into consideration. The paper finds and concludes that if an ecological consciousness that values the natural world is cultivated, it will help in eradicating violent conflicts.

Introduction

Nigeria from north to south and west to east is plagued by violent conflicts. The violent conflicts that have troubled Nigeria include ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, political conflicts, terrorism, militancy, youth restiveness, electoral violence, and the like. From Nigeria's independence until now the country's story is coloured by conflicts, violence, warfare, and turbulence.

In the late 1960s there was the Nigerian civil war. Before the civil war there was the 1966 violent military coup with its attendant crisis and upheavals that led to another counter coup. Other conflicts that have bedevilled the nation include the Warri city oil-ethnic conflicts, the Ife-Modakeke, the Aguleri-Umuleri, Igbide-Emede, the Tiv-Jukun, the Kano Maitasaine conflicts, the youth restiveness and militancy in the Niger Delta, terror upsurge from Boko Haram, and many others. The followings are some more conflicts that have troubled Nigeria-the 1991 and 2000-2001 conflicts in Bauchi state, the 2000-2001 conflicts in Burutu LGA of Delta State, conflicts in Okitipupa area of Ondo State, the 1999-2000 conflicts in Kano State, the conflicts in Gwatu, Kaduna state in 2001, the 2000 conflict in Kaduna metropolis, and many others.

The cost, effects, impact, and consequences of violent conflicts and warfare on human persons, social life, political arena, and economy are well documented and accounted for. These as it were are the social, cultural, political, and economic environment. But the cost on the natural environment or ecosystems are often neglected or glossed over. There are very few works that examine the impact of conflicts on the natural environment in Nigeria. It is to fill this lacuna that this piece is written from and ecological philosophical perspective (ecophilosophy). The natural environment matters and should be taken into consideration in addressing the issue of the consequences and eradication of violent conflicts.

In order to carry out the task that the paper sets for itself, it will hereafter provide some conceptual analyses on the

concepts of ecophilosophy, violent conflicts. Then the piece will examine the causes and consequences of violent conflicts. Since this piece focuses on violent conflicts from an ecophilosophical perspective, it will examine in more detail the environmental consequences of violent conflicts. From there it will propose eradicating violent conflicts through developing an ecological consciousness.

Conceptual Analysis

Ecophilosophy: This term refers to environmental or ecological philosophy. It deals with the issue of human relationship to the natural world or ecosystem. It is an extension of ethics to the domain of the natural world. It is not only what human beings do to or among themselves that counts. What human beings do to the natural world is an ethical question. Human behaviour towards the natural environment could either be right or wrong. The environment refers to the entire earth community and beyond. It includes all that surrounds human persons. To give attention to the nature which is often neglected the natural environment is contrasted with the human and the built environment. Realize that: 'the natural environment is contrasted with the built environment, which comprises the areas and components that are strongly influenced by humans' (Srivastava 3).

Philosophy: Philosophy in the critical sense is the application of the tools of rationality or critical reasoning to reflect over the issues of life, reality or being. It probes into the fundamental basis of reality and takes nothing for granted. When philosophy probes into the human relationship to the environment it is termed

environmental philosophy or ecophilosophy. In a word, 'environmental problems raise fundamental questions of ethics and philosophy-about the ends we should pursue' (DesJardins 7).

The task of this paper is to do an ecophilosophical appraisal of violent conflicts in Nigeria. The task is to assess the consequences of violent conflicts as it affects the environment and humans in Nigeria. This is what is implied by an ecophilosophical appraisal.

Conflicts: There are various definitions and understanding of conflicts. It can be 'defined as a struggle (both overt and covert) among persons or parties who aim at gaining certain objectives or advantages while simultaneously neutralizing, injuring or if possible (in extreme cases) eliminating rivals' (Obaditan 1). For Ifediora (78) 'conflicts are quarrels, fights or struggles between interest groups and are one of the inescapable consequences of man's interaction with fellow humans and his environment.' In another understanding it is a 'struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals' (Coser 8).

Conflicts are a basic fact of life and human interactions. There will always be divergent opinions among individuals and groups. The thing to do is to work to negotiate and dialogue through those differences and differing perceptions. It is when conflict is mismanaged or precipitated into a crisis and it becomes violent that society needs to guard against.

Violence: For Chaturvedi (323) violence is 'destructive action undertaken against property or persons. Can be deliberate or spontaneous, undertaken by government or

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private individuals. It therefore embraces a wide range of actions, including intimidation, terrorism, repression, riots, revolutions and all forms of warfare.' It should be noted that violence does not just refer to conflicts. It has to do with the use of arms and other means to cause havoc, mayhem, harm and injury.

Violent Conflicts: Violent conflicts are conflicts in which one or both of the parties involved in a dispute, disagreement, and struggle over resources, services, exchange of goods, or on which position or decision should be taken; takes up arms or other material or non-material elements to do harm to the other in order to be victorious in the struggle. Non-material implies that it is possible to do harm and destruction through words of mouth, or other spiritual means. In other words, violence includes 'acts of deliberate violence resulting in direct attack on a person's physical or psychological integrity. This category includes all forms of homicide, genocide, war, crime, massacre, murders, terrorism) as well as all types of coercive or brutal action involving physical or psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture, rape, maltreatment' (Alanamu 2-3). This is the sense in which the term will be used here.

Causes of Violent Conflicts in Nigeria
One of the predominant causes of violent conflict is the abuse and misuse of ethnicity. For selfish political and economic gains some people especially those in public office often mobilize on ethnic lines to further their political and power base. The military coups and reprisals that followed the country's independence were tainted by ethnic cleavages (Samuel 149). When people

mobilise on ethnic lines it is not often for the good of the people, but people very often are made to believe that once they support the person from their ethnic group they will get the benefits of power, which very often do not come to them. Some few ethnic warlords or so-called ethnic leaders find it easy to appeal to the sentiments of people from their ethnic groups to fight unnecessary battles. People can be made to fight over lands on common boundaries between ethnic groups, fight for the politician from their village and defend their so-called ethnic cause. Samuel has argued that colonial masters left behind unstable and weak political institutions and failed to build integrated federating units; there was no sense of common unity and oneness among the diverse ethnic groups, and struggle over uneven natural resources in the nation (153-154). This he further state has led to constant rivalries, tension, instability and struggle to overcome domination from other ethnic groups (154). Insecurity in all its manifestations could precipitate violent conflicts. When a people are plagued by and feel a sense of insecurity, some are bound to turn to violence to secure their lives.

Ifediora (79) citing Abebe and Abu indicates that there could be four relevant theories for conflicts to arise and they include: (1) Hobbesian/Freudian paradigm that sees human persons as selfish and prone to violence by nature; (2) the Marxian viewpoint that sees conflicts as the result of oppression by feudal lords and capitalists; (3) the Devil's theory that conflicts are caused by actions of those who benefit from them; and (4) conflicts that arise out of violation of human rights and the result of social injustice. The first theory above is deterministic.

The Marxian perspective is problematic for it equally is deterministic as the dialectic movement of history necessary ends in communism. It is true from the third theory that there can be people who precipitate conflicts because they benefit from them. Then of course oppression of people and the violation of their human rights can make people to be restless.

One area in Nigeria that violent conflicts often emanate from is the religious sphere. The followings could be some causes of religious violence-religious fanaticism, aggressive evangelism, jealousy, incitement, misuse of the media, selfish religious elite, poverty (Alanamu, Muhammed and Adeoye 141-144). There are people who are fanatical about their religion and they have often fought others who disagree with them. Space does not permit narrating all the religious conflicts that have afflicted Nigeria.

It should be noted that it is not possible to examine all the causes and factors leading to violent conflicts here. Violent conflicts are constant occurrences in Nigeria. Having examined the causes, it becomes imperative to examine the consequences of violent conflicts in Nigeria.

Environmental Consequences of Violent Conflicts in Nigeria
In examining the consequences and effects of violent conflicts on the environment, the environment is not only the natural environment. The definition of the environment implies that the environment is the totality of everything that surrounds a thing and in our case the human person. The concern then is with both the human

environment, the built environment which is part of the human environment, and the natural environment.

The Human and Built Environment: Samuel is right to note that: 'any nation that is ready to actualize and sustain democracy, social harmony, economic development, orderly governance and national development must rest on a stable environment. Thus, the incessant ethnic and religious conflicts can only cause the country to degenerate' (154). Conflicts lead to distrust, exacerbate religious differences, sow hatred among people, leads to destruction of lives and properties, make people homeless, fatherless, motherless, childless, and hampers economic growth and development (Samuel 154). Furthermore it is clear that:

> Conflicts especially when it results in violent conflicts have disastrous consequences for the country. Lives and properties are destroyed. When people go on rampage during violent conflicts they destroy public properties and facilities. These very often have to be built again using public funds. Violent conflicts disrupt economic and occupational lives of the people....conflicts hamper democratic and political developments. Resources are devoted to resolving the conflicts instead of putting them into the process of building social and economic infrastructures. Violent conflicts may lead to closure of public highways and roads. These affect flow of goods from rural to the urban market place. It disrupts the

academic calendar in schools as students are
asked to stay out of school to save their lives.
(Ikeke 8)

The Natural Environment: The point that should be
recognized is that whatever happens to the human and
built environment affects the natural environment. It puts
pressures on natural resources, physical spaces, the
landscape, atmosphere, and ecosphere. Human persons
everywhere and in Nigeria depend on the natural world.
When human lives and properties are destroyed during
conflicts more resources such as medicine, food, shelter,
clothing, water, have to be tapped from nature to meet
human needs. When people are wounded during
conflicts human blood pollutes the streams and the land.
In the fight between militants, and Boko Haram fights
which often takes place not only in open spaces but also
in the forests and vegetative areas; plants and trees are
destroyed. The habitat of animals and birds are ravaged.
Destruction of human buildings and social infrastructure
means that more wood from trees, cement from rock,
petroleum from crude oil, and water from the rivers have
to be harvested to meet more needs that would not have
arisen if not for the conflicts.
The painful reality is that very few research deals with
the effect of conflicts on the natural environment. In the
conflicts between pastoralists and farmers in Middle Belt
of Nigeria, militants and government forces in the Niger
Delta, Boko Haram and government forces, etc they all
have disastrous impact on the natural environment.
These impacts are pushed to the background, ignored,
and rarely mentioned in studies in conflicts. It is as if the

natural environment does not matter. In the book, *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation* published in 1999 by Academic Associate Peace Works that contains 12 chapters there is no chapter that specifically treats the issue of the impact of conflict on the environment. If it is mentioned in any of the chapters at all it is mentioned in passing. It is as if the environment does not count. All conflicts take place on the land or the natural environment. When people fight and engage in warfare it causes deforestation, desertification, pollution of land and streams by human blood, destruction of habitats for endangered animals and plants, destruction of medicinal and pharmaceutical resources, etc. One of the 22 chapters in the book *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies* published by University of Peace deals with the *Environment, Conflict and Peace* in Africa. It is noteworthy that the environment is given a place here, but very often as with many other works that deal with the environment and the question of peace and conflict, the focus is not on how conflicts impact the environment but on how the environment induces conflicts when there is soil erosion, desertification, deforestation, and global warming.

This paper argues that the focus must shift to consider how human conflicts cause environmental damage and destruction. The environment should be fore-grounded and taken as a subject by its own right. The just mentioned chapter sees the environment as a threat to peace and security. This same trend is what you see in the book, *Linking Conflict Diagnosis, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Management in Contemporary*

Africa by J 'Bayo Adekanye. Of the 10 chapters in the book none examines the environment from the perspective of the impact of human conflicts on the environment. If the environment is mentioned it is from the perspective of how environmental change causes conflicts. While it is true that environmental change inspire conflicts and human insecurity yet the other side of how human conflicts, warfare, violence, and war cause damage to the environment should not be neglected.   In a piece like Cyril Obi's *Globalised Images of Environmental Security in Africa* that appeared in *Beyond Conflict Resolution: Managing African Security in the 21ˢᵗ Century* that was published in 2001 by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs; though a statement on page 169 mentions violent ethnic and tribal wars as leading to environmental degradation, yet the focus is not on this, it is on how globalization and the media has complicated the environmental troubles in Africa (Obi 169). The same trend is what you find in Akpenpuun Dzurgba's *Prevention and Management of Conflict: In Honour of Professor Segun Odunuga*; Remi Anofowose's Violence *and Politics in Nigeria: The TIV, Yoruba and Niger Delta Experience*; Isaac Olawale Albert's edited book, *Local Approaches to Conflict Transformation*; and Ogoh Alubo's *Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship in the Central Region (Nigeria)*.   In all of them the environment is hardly focused on as suffering from the harm of human conflict. This is not to deny the fact that there are books or papers that deal with the impact of human conflicts on the environment. They are rare and few. One of the academic write-ups that is helpful in filling the gap in the

literature on the environment and conflicts especially with regard to the impact of conflicts in the environment is one by Bassey and Aniah titled, *Environmental Impact of Conflict: Complex Scenarios and Sustainable Management Implications in Nigeria*. They state clearly that the impact of conflicts goes beyond psycho-social, economic, demographic, and includes environment implications (Bassey and Aniah 142). They affirm that conflicts lead to biodiversity loss, reduced agricultural productivity, produce environmental refugees and displaced people who overstress the carrying capacity of the environment, causes poor sanitation and diseases that can be harmful to the environment (Bassey and Aniah 143-145).

From an ecological perspective this paper avers that the exploration of oil in the Niger Delta and the attendant oil spills, pollution, and land degradation that accompanies it is a form of violence that is been done to the natural world. Perhaps the meaning of conflict has to be extended, it is not only what happens between humans, it is also what human persons are doing to the earth that cannot speak back to humans. As it is, as Bassey and Aniah shows this leads to systematic endangerment of species and their extinction (147). Oil multinational companies have often through their oppressive and unjust activities caused conflicts that have destroyed farmlands, rivers, streams, ancestral grooves. Their activities have caused flooding of forests, destruction of animal habitats. Destruction and burning of oil pipelines and wells by militants in the Niger Delta cause pollution that has repercussions for years to come. Regarding the harm done to the environment of Ogoniland the United

Nations Environment Programme says it will take up to 25-30 years to remediate (par. 11). The consequences of oil conflicts on the environment are too numerous to be recounted.

That conflict has impact on the environment should not be in doubt for 'warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. State shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development as necessary' (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development Principle 24). The United Nations Environment Programme in 2006 says that:

> Armed conflict has multiple, long and short-term impacts on development, and on environmental and human well-being. The effects even of internal conflicts are felt at various levels, within the immediate area of conflict and often in neighbouring countries. Conflicts undercut or destroy environmental, physical, human and social capital, diminishing available opportunities for sustainable development. (Par 1)

Every form of violent conflicts has serious implications and repercussions on the environment. It is important for these to be studied and society should work to eliminate the causes of violent conflicts and wars. Take for instance with all the negative effects of war on the environment, there seem to be no study yet on the environmental consequences of the Nigerian civil war, that this author knows of. If there is it is worth bringing

to the forefront. It is time to eradicate all forms of violent conflicts.

Eradicating Violent Conflicts through Ecological Consciousness

Many recommendations have be given and implemented in order to eradicate violent conflicts in Nigeria. These include establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission, the Federal Government Amnesty Programme, the Nigerian Inter-religious Council, etc. These will not be explained in detail here. The concern of this paper is that from an ecophilosophical perspective, the issue of re-orientation of values is the most important thing that needs to be done to eradicate violent conflicts. This at times is neglected. The new orientation is not simply to human values but to ecocentric values. In suggesting solutions to managing environmental impact of conflicts, 'the effort should go beyond conflict-limiting strategies involving altering incentives, payoffs or the organization of society. There is also an imperative need to alter the dominant metaphors surrounding a dispute or the interpretations of the parties in conflict...' (152). The dominant metaphor or lens with which people look at conflicts should become holistic. This implies that conflict should be looked at not only from the interest of the human parties but from the angle of the wellbeing of the entire earth community. Humans involved in conflict in Nigeria should realize that their conflicts harm the animals, plants, and other organisms in the land. Even when one party wins in a conflict, nobody has actually won for it is

often at the expense of land community that sustains human life and other creatures on the planet.

Without a deep ecological consciousness that respect the intrinsic value in the natural world, it will be difficult to overcome all violent conflicts. When human persons begin to think seriously about the harm they are doing to the environment through their conflicts, they will likely think twice before engaging in violent conflicts. This is so because they will recognize that their human survival on earth depends on environmental health and wellbeing. Human decisions whether to engage in violence or war even so-called just wars should be conditioned by the environmental consideration. It is not only human wellbeing that counts. It is true that non-human persons and the natural world cannot speak back to us. But the harm that is done to the natural world often reverberates and comes back to human persons. As noted a healthy environment will foster healthy human flourishing.

It was not the goal of this work to build a systematic Nigerian philosophy of nature. The goal was to highlight the need to take the environmental perspective into consideration in conflict discussion. This environmental perspective should take into consideration the many Nigerian environmental policies and agencies such as the Federal Ministry of Environment, and the Environmental Impact Assessment Act. Nigeria does not lack ideas about environmental protection. What is needed more is for these issues to form the basis of a vibrant environmental education, public awareness campaign, environmental sanitation activities, and the implementation of the environmental laws of the nation.

It is in this light that the following conclusions are offered.

Concluding Reflections

It is a fact that violent conflicts have plagued Nigeria up to the present day. The consequences of violent conflicts are innumerable. Violent conflicts as this paper has revealed has consequences not only for human persons but the entire natural environment of Nigeria. There is need for conflicts studies and the humanities in the study of conflicts to pay more attention to ecological issues while not neglecting the human dimension. This can be done if there is a focus on developing in citizens an ecological consciousness that examines issues from the value of the entire ecosystem, with humans inclusive. This is not to infer that only ecological consciousness development is necessary. There is vital need for conservation of nature. In conserving nature we become more humane, psychologically balanced and morally upright. Humans have stewardship responsibility to nature. Nature is to be conserved while at the same time meeting the moderate needs of humans. When this is done it will greatly help in the reduction and eventual eradication of conflicts.

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