IMPACT OF MODERN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MECHANISM ON IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The presence of the colonizers has created a new form of conflict in Africa. There was an established, recognized and effective system of resolving conflict prior to the advent of the colonial masters. The presence of modern conflict management has posed a great challenge to the existing traditional method. The work adopted a descriptive method to study the impact of modern conflict resolution on Igwebuike philosophy. The study is necessitated by the experimentation of the novel model of conflict resolution in the same environment and space, where the traditional conflict resolution once blossomed. This research work will attract the attention of policy makers, traditional rulers and political leaders in deciding the best method to resolve conflict. It has also exposed the deficiency and corruption inherent in modern conflict resolution. Thus, in the healing process, modern methods only rub and never massage the broken bones of conflict in Igwebuike philosophy of peace and conflict resolution.
Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Conflict, Management, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Resolution, Modern

Introduction

Africa, just like other societies, was developing at her own pace with well-established mechanisms of managing conflicts before the colonial masters came and sewed their own western adjudication system that are alien to Africans. With the advent of colonialism, African values, norms and beliefs, which provided the normative and undergirding framework for conflict management, were severely weakened, undermined and disregarded. However, the resilience of African justice systems across African states illustrates that they still manage to occupy a central place in the world of dispute resolution in Africa. While in Europe, for instance, the police are a means of crime detection, several African societies relied on oath taking, divination and blood covenant in pre-colonial times. Traditional African methods of resolving conflict were geared towards restoring peace, and not necessarily in punishing the offenders. Emphasis was

not on punishment but on reconciliation and restoration of social harmony among the disputants in conflict. Thus, Western justice systems thrived on commissions of inquiries, constitution and court system of lawyers and judges. Africans used council of elders, king's court, people's assemblies, etc., for dispute management and justice dispensation.

A very important reason for being aware of our tradition is so that we may draw lessons from them for the solutions to current problems. It is obvious that the Western approaches to conflict resolution have failed here in Nigeria in bringing back peace, and people even believe that the ongoing conflicts in the country are due to these Western systems of adjudication (Charles, 2016 p. 4). Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms may not have outlived their usefulness, especially when compared to modern reality, for pre-colonial Igbo society was embedded in the tradition and culture of the people.

There have been numerous conflicts in the history of Igbo people of eastern Nigeria. These conflicts can be due to many factors, such as; ethnic rivalry, religious violence, dispute over ownership of land, boundary issues, as well as political elections. Through the barometer of *Igwebuike* philosophy, this paper tends to study the impact of modern conflict management mechanism, using some of the basic features of *Igwebuike* philosophy of peace and conflict resolution to draw the conclusion that modern conflict management in Igbo land has actually been a resounding failure.

"MODERN" Conceptualized

In peace studies, the term modern is used to differentiate with what is traditional. While the traditional refers to the indigenous or rural community which upholds and demonstrates the customs and norms of African society, modern refers to other societies outside Africa, and especially the European societies. We must understand here that the nature and functions of customs and norms in modern society quite differed from those of the African traditional societies. The modern world is also a world of competing interests, ideas, values, views, ideologies, religions and cultures – a world full of conflicting interests on all levels, between individuals and groups of people within their societies, between all sectors of societies, as well as between economies, nations, states, and so forth. Different conflict methods are used to manage and increase cooperation, promote reconciliation and strengthen relationships in the modern

world. Modern here refers to the Western world as opposed to the African continent.

Modern can also be applied to those things that exist in the present age, especially in contrast to those of a former age or an age long past. Hence, modern, in this case, can mean the conflict management method used presently as opposed to the traditional methods that have been in existence since time immemorial in Africa. The use of modern model of conflict management is relatively new in the African society. However, before the introduction of a new method by alien cultures, the traditional methods of settling disputes varied from one society to the other. These methods were essentially based on each society's way of life. The introduction had a lot of imposition and condemnation of the original pattern of conflict resolution. Worthy of note here is that the experimentation of the novel model of conflict resolution was in the same environment and space, where the traditional conflict resolution once blossomed. The environment and space were the same, but the principles and practitioners of the conflict resolution were quite different. Even the result was proportionately different. It is, however, important to emphasize the point that the environment of conflict situation largely depends on the applicability of what method is in vogue. Environmental setting, therefore, is very necessary a determining factor in the desirability and adaptation of a specific method to use in the resolution of a particular conflict.

Conflict Defined
Etymologically, conflict is a word that is derived from the Latin word, "*confligere*", which means to "strike together". Conflict means to strike, to fight, to struggle or battle, to clash, confrontation, a controversy or quarrel, active opposition, strife or incompatibility, to meet in opposition or hostility, to contend, to go contrary or to be at variance. Nwolise (2003) agrees with these, as he describes conflict as a clash, confrontation, battle or struggle. From the definitions above, conflict is all about disagreement on issues or things. It is disagreement in opinions between people or groups, due to differences in personal attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. For Charles (2016), "Conflict can be defined as the manifestation of a hostile attitude in the face of conflicting interests between individuals, groups or states. The conflicting interests can be over resources, identity, power, status or values" (p.1). It is generally seen as a struggle between two or more people over the same scarce resources at the same time. Ezenwoko and Osagie (2014) assert that, conflicts are generally accepted to be an inevitable phenomenon in the lives of men (p. 136). It cannot be completely

separated from the inter-relationships that exist among individuals and communities. It is often argued that because human beings are by nature competitive and aggressive, there will always be conflicts amongst them. Conflict is, therefore, a natural occurrence among human beings.

Peace scholars generally agree that there must be more than one party to have a conflict and that the time factor is important. One cannot avoid conflict in families, at work or even when walking on the road. To this effect, Zartman (1997) posits that, "Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions." Peace scholars can go on defining conflict, but the truth is as Faleti (2014) observed, "Conflict is a fluid and definitely elastic concept which can be twisted into different shapes and has become an issue over which scholars find themselves in sharp disagreement with their colleagues" (p.36). This is true, owing to the fact that as he (Faleti 2014) observed, conflict can be constructive or destructive. Constructively, conflict can be used to explore different solutions to a problem and stimulate creativity, while, destructively, conflict can hinder progress, and cause hatred and division in the society (p.36). It has been demonstrated that continuous interaction among the individuals and communities cannot always be peaceful.

Causes of Conflict
   1. **Competition for inadequate resources**
Competition is the major source of conflict, because it drives people into struggling for limited resources, and people put in all their energy to get what they need. The conflict that occurs as a result of inadequate resources may assume a destructive dimension when what is available is not judiciously distributed. Those that are relatively deprived would always struggle to improve their lot. It is a situation of survival of the fittest.

   2. **Contradicting value systems**
 Another factor which may bring about conflict is contradicting value systems, such as the religious belief, ideological positions and general world view of the interacting parties. Values are beliefs or principles which are important to people. Conflict arises when one person's value system contradict another person's value system. Value system conflict is the most difficult conflict to resolve, because people will always hold on tenaciously to their position, believing that their opinion is better than that of others.

3. Group and individuals needs

Needs here range from psychological, political, economic to social needs of man. These are things that are fundamentally of utmost importance to people; they must be satisfied as soon as the purchasing power is available. These needs could be love, belonging, association, power etc. Therefore, needs have the potential of generating conflict, when perceived and expressed differently by people or group.

4. Manipulation of information

Manipulation of information can cause conflict in any community, relationship or workplace. When the flow of information is distorted or the content changed, conflict is bound to arise. Distortion of information comes in the process of passing information, from the sender to the receiver. As information move from one channel to the other, distortion sets in. distortion could either occur in packaging or in understanding of the message.

5. Perception

Lastly, perception has been discovered to cause conflict. Perception refers to how we see, understand or interpret the situations of things around us. What we see is sometimes different from what it really is, or from the way others see, understand or interpret them. You do not judge a book by its cover.

Conflict Management

Conflict managements are broad terms for methods and mechanisms used to avoid, minimize and manage conflicts between different parties (Niklas and Mikael, 2005). Wallensteen (2002) differentiates between conflict management and conflict resolution, saying that, conflict management typically focuses on the armed aspects of conflict: bringing the fighting to an end, limiting the spread of the conflict and, containing it;conflict resolution is more ambitious, as it expects the parties to face jointly their incompatibility and find a way to live with it or dissolve it. A number of scholars, especially from non-Western societies, have argued that conflict management is a successful tool for resolving conflicts over a longer time period, and that it creates the foundation for effective conflict resolution. This is contrasted with a more Western argument that the importance of conflict management lies in its ability to solve short-term conflicts. Both of these views are entirely accurate, and compatible, and there might just be a cultural difference in our focus (Niklas et al, 2005). Both of these views can, and should, be incorporated in a theoretical framework for conflict management and

resolution, since they entail no inherent contradiction. They are in fact often applied in different stages of a conflict and address fundamentally different issues. Nevertheless, a number of Western scholars claim that the difference is one of long-term versus short-term perspectives and that it is a question of either resolving the underlying problem or managing the current problem.

Therefore, management measures are applied in later phases when a conflict is manifest, but before violence has occurred. Conflict resolution could, on the other hand, be applied in the de-escalation phase after a violent conflict has occurred. Nevertheless, resolution can be applied in all phases as soon as the conflict is manifest. Thus, traditional peace scholars use conflict resolution for African method and conflict management for modern method, because in the traditional method, conflicts are often rooted out. Practitioners try to dig out the root cause of every conflict, while such cannot be said of the modern method. Modern practitioners manage conflict; they try to reduce the effect of conflict to the barest minimum.

The Practice of Modern Conflict Management in Igwebuike Philosophy

Prior to the advent of modern culture, Igbo people had a well laid down, though undocumented, traditional process of conflict resolution. Charles (2016) asserts that "Each people, race, or identity group in the world had (and have) their own ways of doing things especially as it concerns social control and conflict resolution, (p.7). The big questions have always been, why the imposition of an alien method of managing conflict on African society? What is wrong with the traditional method? Peace scholars have debated and argued over the most appropriate mechanisms for managing conflicts in Africa. Some scholars believe that the application of Western methods in resolving conflicts in local communities may have some limited usefulness. Others, however, believe that the use of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution would be most appropriate in addressing issues that are emanating from a socio-economic and political setting that is not completely modern. Yet, others think that a successful tackling of the conflict challenges that abound in Igbo-land would require a new and novel thinking that would accommodate both mechanisms by according preference to one or the other where it is most suitable (Charles, 2016 p.4). Chris (2014) disagrees with Charles, saying, "To a great extent, the Igbo people do not believe in the modern conflict management process, they believe in using the

past history to settle conflict. They believe that to settle dispute amicably no side suffers any adverse effect, they go home happy."

Interestingly, the pre-colonial Igbo society was a decentralized society and decisions were taken at family, clan and age grade levels. Council of elders, usually made up of the most elderly and senior members of the community, exists to decide individual and community disputes. Dispute resolution is seen closely as a system of justice, to which the community, rather than individual leaders, is at the centre (Shedrack, 2014, p.98). Therefore, the council of elders is the highest judicial institution in Igbo land. Sadly enough, today, the council of elders who were once seen as custodians of wisdom and people of impeccable character are gradually being overshadowed in the administration of justice in the land to an alien system. Charles (2016) strongly believes that African value systems and conflict transformation systems are a viable means of resolving African conflicts today. The use of modern methods of conflict management, more often than not, has been a resounding failure in Igbo society.

Now, using the *Igwebuike* philosophy of peace and conflict resolution as a standard of Igbo conflict resolution, let us discuss the impact of modern conflict management. According to Kanu, "*Igwebuike* is an Igbo word; one of the major dialects in Africa. It is a principle that is at the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African ontology" (2017, p. 6). He went on to say that it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, Igwe bu ike, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: '*Igwe*' is a noun which means 'number' or 'population,' usually a huge number or population. '*Bu*' is a verb, which means 'is.' '*Ike*' is another verb, which means 'strength' or 'power' (Kanu, 2016). Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power;' that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. Its English equivalents are 'complementarity', 'solidarity' and 'harmony'. The preferred concept, however, is 'complementarity' (Kanu, 2017, p. 6).

At first contact with *Igwebuike*, one can comfortably say that modern conflict management mechanism has failed. *Igwebuike* as a concept thrives on complementarity, "to be with others". The modern method breeds more conflict than resolution; this is true because man is a social being created to be with

others. On this point, Kanu (2017), the founding father of *Igwebuike* African Philosophy, avers that,

> As an indigenous African philosophy, *Igwebuike* gives an understanding of the human person as a being who is in relation with the other in the world. It establishes that there exists a common link between human persons and that it is through this relationship that every other human person realizes himself or herself. It is the foundation of openness, availability, affirmation of the other, freedom from threat based on the ability or good in others (p. 6).

The Western world, with its individualistic ideology, does not encourage community living, this "to be with others". Thus, the force on Africans to accept their method of conflict resolution creates more complex conflict, of identity, culture, tradition and personality. Again, modern method uses force to enforce judgment. They often use the police, and in some cases army, to enforce whatever judgment that has been reached in the law court. Funny enough, conflict always arises when modern method tries to enforce judgment. This is totally absent in traditional method. Compliance to decision reached is a collective responsibility in traditional conflict resolution. This is supported by the first basic features of *Igwebuike* philosophy of peace and conflict resolution, which states that, "Conflict is not viewed as a problem between the disputants but as a problem of the entire community. Conflict, therefore, attracts the attention of the community." Going further, Kanu (2017) elaborates on the fifth basic feature of *Igwebuike* philosophy of peace and conflict resolution, saying, "There is a high degree of public participation. There are no secret trails in African traditional legal system. Since the problem between the disputants is seen as a community problem, in restoring harmony, there must be a general satisfaction among the public regarding the procedure and outcome of the case (p. 9)." To this end, conflict between/among members of the community is viewed as a community conflict. The seventh and eighth basic features of *Igwebuike* philosophy of peace and conflict resolution holds that, "Decisions are reached through agreement rather than force….The enforcement of a decision is reached through social pressure rather than the police or military" (Kanu, 2017, p.9). So, acceptance of the judgment is seen there and then through demonstrative action of reconciliation. Reconciliation is at the heart of Igbo conflict resolution. The institutions that resolve conflict in Igbo traditional society speak with truth and integrity to the conscience of the parties in conflict; a soft

word, no doubt turns away anger, and in African traditional societies, words have power. Moreover, the words of elders are anchored on wisdom. This was captured beautifully well in the third basic feature of *Igwebuike* philosophy of peace and conflict resolution by Kanu (2017, p.9) in these words: "The emphasis is on reconciliation and restoring social harmony. It purpose is, therefore, aimed at rebuilding broken relationships and restoring the community."

It must be made clear here, that every effort to manage conflicts through administrative and bureaucratic machinery in Igbo land, coupled with theories and methods crafted in Euro-American institutions, has failed to yield practical results in many conflict situations. To this, Kariuki (2015) opines that,

> Modernity has had its fare share of negative impacts on African justice systems. In pre-colonial period, elders were the rich and wealthiest people as they had land and livestock. Their wealth and respect enabled them to be independent during dispute resolution processes. However, in modern societies, younger people have accumulated wealth and in most cases, older people rely on the younger people. This has enabled dispute resolution by elders to be affected by bribery, corruption and favoritism… Apart from corruption and bribery, modernity and westernization have broken down the close social ties and social capital between families and kinsmen (pp.12-13)."

The presence of modern conflict management has posed a great challenge to the existing traditional method. Being a method that is corrupt and manipulative, people guilty,, especially those who are easily run to them for settlement, knowing that they can get their way to "a favourable judgment."

Hence, Nwolise (2004) posits that African traditional societies are known to hold secrets of peacemaking and peace building locked in their culture formed from customs and norms, before the coming of the colonial masters disrupted them. The processes of conflict resolution, such as mediation, counseling, conciliation, informal tribunals, arbitration of several types and criminal and civil justice system may not achieve the desired result. Over the centuries, African societies have built a wealth of experience as well as specific mechanisms and institutions to prevent conflicts, peacefully resolve conflicts once they arise and work through reconciliation processes. Even with modernization, these traditional institutions still hold sway, keeping the heart of the society in harmony.

Inasmuch as modern adjudication system is being practiced, traditional methods of resolving conflicts are still alive in our communities.

Conclusion

Modern conflict management might have helped in the process of conflict resolution, but it has not resolved conflicts. It may be a means but not an end to conflict resolution in African society. So, forcing this method on Africans has never worked and will not still work. Africans should be allowed to continue with the traditional method which has always been in existence, tested and trusted to resolve conflict in our society. Since it has come to stay, modern conflict management mechanism should assist traditional conflict resolution in resolving conflicts, and not the other way round. Through the *Igwebuike* barometer, we have discovered that modern method caused more conflict than resolving it, since it does not foster community living, "the being with the other." The end product is not to make peace but to create enemies, as the judgment pronounced in modern conflict method breeds hatred, disunity and rivalry.

Civilization brought a cultural conflict between the African and the modern cultures. The modern culture was viewed as superior and dominant, thus subjugating African cultures. Cultural imperialism was extended to the world of dispute resolution. Therefore, modernized system of justice is retributive in nature by emphasizing a winner-loser paradigm in dispute resolution that does not resolve the underlying causes of the conflict. The adoption of the modernized justice system in Igbo land has made many traditional societies to revert to their own traditional dispute resolution by elders. The traditional method of resolving conflict is the best form of conflict management for the African people, since it digs deep into the root causes of the conflict to ensuring that peace is given a chance to reign once more through reconciliation.

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