Peace Studies and Practice
Journal of the Society of Peace Studies and Practice

2018 Edition
Pp 1-14

Historical and Cultural Dimensions of Social Conflicts in Nigeria

Godwin Sogolo, *fspsp, fnal.*
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
National Open University of Nigeria
Abuja, Nigeria

Protocol
Key Concepts
Ethnicity: The state or fact of belonging to a particular group with a common and distinct culture, religion and language in relation to contiguous or co-existing groups. In a political context, it can mean a factor in the interaction with other groups and allocation of values
Conflict: Disagreement, dispute, rift between individuals, groups or communities arising from the pursuit of incompatible goals.

Being a Keynote Address delivered at the International Conference and General Meeting of the Society for Peace Studies and Practice, held at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Abuja, on July 9 - 11, 2018.

Introduction

One of the common flaws in the works of scholars of social research is the failure to discern relevant connections cutting through social issues or locate same in their appropriate contexts. Another is the inadvertent promotion of the agenda of the prevailing socio-political ideology. In most cases, either the subjects of discourse are analysed in isolation or done in paradigms and models alien to the contexts in which they operate. In no other area of research are these afflictions and consequential distortions more pronounced than the literature produced by European social anthropologists on African forms of life, particularly in their analyses of traditional value systems, modes of governance, ethnicity and social conflicts.

This discussion starts with a brief analysis of European scholarship in Africa and some of the intellectual distortions caused in their study of African forms of life. The arguments derive mainly from an observation of the historical fact that the brutality of the slave trade in Africa and the authoritarian/divisive style of colonial administration had two major consequences: (i) the alienation of the colonized people and (ii) the transformation of the existing kingship units into larger ethnic groups intensely driven by political interests. The paper tries to show how the divisiveness so implanted has been reinforced by the speculative ideas of social anthropologists – with prejudices and biases arising from the evocation of cultural differences between Europeans and Africans, as against the known fact of cultural universals that define humanity. Using the Nigerian experience as an illustration, it is further argued that these divisive forces have continued to fuel conflicts in Africa. The paper, therefore, urges African scholars, especially researchers in peace and conflict studies, to endeavour to clear the heaps of distortions so as to pave the way for a comprehensive understanding of

the dynamics of social conflicts in contemporary Africa.

Methodological Issues

Colonial incursion into Africa was a comprehensive package of assorted goals, comprising religion, culture, education, etc., all integrated in one agenda of political administration which was either peacefully executed or done with a show of force. The educational component was, for quite some time, dominated by European social anthropologists whose old breed has almost totally died out. The new entrants (now joined by Africans), although still operating within the same established norms, are beginning to refine their language and vocabulary, replacing terms such as "tribes" and "tribalism" with "ethnic groups" and "ethnicity", as now applied in other branches of the social sciences.

These changes are coming, not out of volition or commitment to correct scientific classification, but due mainly to pressures mounted by Africanists and African scholars. As Aidan Southall puts it, these are adjustments that have become necessary considering that in matters of this sort, "human feelings have to prevail over strict logic"[1]. And the feelings he has in mind refer to the special discomfort of African trained social anthropologists who have become part and parcel of a profession known from beginning to be the intellectual arm of the colonial conquest in Africa. It is unfortunate that much of what our scholars know about Africa today is through the prism of European social anthropologists, and a great deal of it is distorted!

There are very few living scholars today who can proclaim ignorance of the accusations of racial bias against the European practitioners of the discipline. Such intellectual prejudices date back to the days of Lucien Levy-Bruhl, the French anthropologist, who, in 1923, described Africans as having a "pre-logical mentality", meaning a mindset that was incapable of logical thinking. And, although there are many post-modernist scholars now rethinking the discipline, such as the contributors to James Clifford's *Writing Cultures*[2], the new sentiments are still not shared by a large number of anthropologists. Consequently, some practitioners in the discipline still harbour the silent postulate of a difference in kind, if not in quality, between the so-called primitive societies and their counterparts in the "modern" world.

The categorization is remarkably similar to Karl Popper's dichotomy between closed and open societies based on an evolutionary theory of human development in which Western history stands as the archetype of the history of mankind. And until recently, Africa was never considered to be a part of this historical process, as, indeed, H.R. Trevor-Roper, the renowned Oxford Professor of history, once told a group of undergraduates who wanted to be taught African history. "Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. At present, there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not the subject of history"[3], meaning simply that Africa has no past worth remembering. Influenced by the preponderance of this attitude, the study of African social institutions was undertaken without paying sufficient attention to the significant historical and social forces that shaped them, and the context in which they can be given meaningful interpretation.

Although academics do not belong to the category of those who formulate or implement social and political decisions, their views and findings do, quite often, have considerable influence on policy making. And it was in this extended sense that social anthropologists of the colonial era were perceived as a group of support staff to the colonial mission in Africa. Indeed, their approach, choice of subject matter and social proximity to colonial personnel, gave support to the view that they were united by ideology, values and goals. It explains why Western social

anthropologists were uninterested in studying the impact of colonialism on the formation of African social structures. They could not possibly raise critical questions about the very colonial ideological foundation of which they were an integral part.

Could the same reason have accounted for the failure of colonial - and to a large extent contemporary - scholars in relating the social structures of African societies to those very crucial historical events that shaped their character? I can understand the hurry of Western scholars to leave behind the history of slavery, slave trade and colonialism. Yet, it is not my intention to turn this discussion into another exercise in colonialism-bashing. I merely want to call attention to the magnitude of distortions caused by the ahistorical approach adopted by social anthropologists in their study of what they regarded as the complexities of "tribes" and "tribal relations," kinship systems, ethnicity, state-civil society relations, etc., without much reference to the historical forces that were primarily responsible for casting these systems into the forms in which they exist today. I should return shortly to this point of transformation from kinship to ethnicity, but, first, let us consider the intellectual climate that influenced the views of these scholars.

The boom period for social anthropology in Africa was a direct consequence of the rising faith in science and its new concept of modernization in Europe. European value-systems at the time had shifted from the traditional authority of religion to the new industrial age and science-oriented values. The new developments also enjoyed the support of an increasingly centralized bureaucratic state the sole goal of which was economic growth. This process of European modernization continued well into the second half of the twentieth century[4].

Our interest in the modernization process here is that it has continued to enjoy the intellectual support of positivism, a doctrine that was once popular for upholding the pre-eminence of science and the supremacy of scientific principles over and above everything else. For positivism, truth, rationality and anything worthy of serious attention could only be assessed through the application of the principles of science, principles believed to be fixed, eternal and unchanging. Indeed, extreme variants of positivism quite often insisted on the application of scientific standards in the measurement of human values.

Such was the intellectual orientation, indeed, the mandate which Western anthropologists took to Africa during the colonial and early post-colonial periods. They were infested with an eternal truth-seeking epistemology, which made it difficult to credit them with much goodwill. Their supreme faith in modern science and, therefore, the presumed superiority of European cultures over non-scientific cultures, led to a high tendency on the part of these scholars to superimpose European categories of thought on African social institutions. And it was within this cult of "objectivity" that the greatest damage was done to the true image and form of the African life.

Starting from the late 1950's and the 1960's, there was a gradual shift of interest in social scholarship from the study of family structures and discrete kinship systems of primordial groupings to the larger social formations, now referred to as ethnic groups. This redirection of focus was a result of the increasing waves of ethnic conflicts in all parts of the world. It is true that in early post-colonial history, nearly all of Africa suffered from countless bouts of ethnic conflicts. What is no longer true, however, is the impression that ethnicity is nothing but an undesirable outgrowth of "tribal sentiments", known only to the underdeveloped cultures of Africa. The reality of modern life is that ethnic divisions have become common experience in all cultures, doing severe damage to both developed and underdeveloped nations of the world. Moynihan is thus right in his observation that after the Second World War, "the

greatest incidence of violence has been ethnic in nature and origin"[5]

Ethnicity: A Conceptual Analysis

There are countless misconceptions about the concept of ethnicity and the forces that keep it alive. Ordinarily, ethnicity, understood merely as the attributes of an enclosure of social collectivity, should not be of any political interest, not even of scholarly concern. But ethnic divisions tend easily to translate into interest groups, thus occupying a political space in society and, therefore, an important factor in the body politic. In other words, an ethnic group may, through purposive action, become an active political sub-unit within a multi-ethnic society, prepared to negotiate its interests with other sub-units and the larger society. It is the failure to find some measure of "harmonization or accommodation" that constitutes the main source of ethnic conflicts.

Of course, Marxist-oriented thinkers do not accept this analysis of interest based on ethnic attachment since, for them, basic social divisions arise mainly from the contradictions inherent in the capitalist modes of production. They believe that once the problem of class division is resolved, all conflicts of ethnic character would disappear. It seems obvious that experience does not lend support to this position, considering the indiscriminate surge of ethnic conflicts across societies of diverse ideologies and of different levels of economic development.

A closely related misconception concerning the character of ethnicity was the 1963 forecast by Glazer and Moynihan in their *Beyond the Melting Pot,*[6] to the effect that trends in American social development pointed to the dissolution of all ethnic conflicts and the birth of a homogenous society. As Moynihan himself had to admit, "ethnicity was very much a force in the (American) polity, possibly stronger than it had been, such that it might even qualify as a new social aggregate, which would come to be known as "post-industrial."[7] That much is the recognition of the persistent dangers of ethnicity even in the United States, which is supposed to possess the most sophisticated techniques for conflict resolution. The compelling conclusion then is that ethnicity cuts across all contemporary societies; it is neither an exclusive legacy of African societies, nor can it be easily eliminated by modernization.

Just like any other social phenomenon, ethnicity has its own variants as determined by the socio-cultural history and experience of a given society. And for this reason, post-modernist scholars always caution against undue generalizations in the name of objective scientific inquiry. The problem with social anthropologists in Africa has been their tendency to draw on models from European history for applications to the African experience. Consequently, they tend to distort the academic presentation of the realities of social existence in Africa.

Misleading extrapolations abound in the works of European scholars. Thus, we know from the social history of Europe, especially England, that kinship and related primordial formations withered away at the dawn of modern industrialization and, therefore, were not involved in any significant encounter with the state[8]. In a number of cases, they dissolved into centralized political formations. Under situations of this kind, it might be correct to say that the kinship system withered away as European societies passed from simple to more complex forms. But, it is wrong to use such specific findings in formulating a general theory on the evolution of kinship systems in all cultures. Maybe, the European situation has established that under the circumstances that prevailed at the time, economic and industrial development dissolved the divisive forces of ethnicity, thus turning them into cultural centres rather than units of political loyalty. In other words, under the affluent and flourishing economic conditions in Europe,

ethnic sentiments waned considerably or even vanished totally.

However, experience has shown that the situation in Africa today contrasts sharply with the European theoretical model. Rather than wither away, kinship ties and ethnicity in modern Africa have tended to wax stronger, both in dimension and intensity. Leonard Plotnicov's study of the relationship between rural and urban life in Nigeria testifies to this, when he reports that "extensive kinship ties…. have altered little. Ethnic associations have not only persisted; in many cases, they have increased in the new towns and cities."[9] Both historical and social circumstances have conferred on these institutions new functions and social significance that are essential for an adequate understanding of their essence.

The Slave Trade and Emergence of Social Divisions

It is a basic axiom in social theory that a social institution finds meaning only when located in its historical context. I believe that the major determinants of the evolution of the kinship system, and subsequent emergence of ethnicity in Africa, were their encounter with the slave trade and colonialism. I also have no doubt that it is the failure of social scholars to grasp this connection that has created distortions that still flourish in much of contemporary literature on African forms of life. And, I should add that the kind of damage done to Africa in this regard cannot find equivalent compensation nor, indeed, reparations of any sort.

Historically, the slave trade remains the worst evil ever known to mankind. Part of this evil was the brutalization and inhuman treatment of Africans by Arab and European slave dealers; another was the carting away of Africa's human and material resources. However, the ugliest side of the slave trade in Africa, an aspect not often emphasized by Western scholars, was the irreversible damage it caused to African social institutions. In spite of the controversy on the subject,[10] the weight of evidence from the literature available shows clearly that there was, in pre-slave trade Africa, a certain measure of social harmony (although punctured by occasional conflicts) under traditional state authorities, kings and rulers who provided the people with protection and security.

It was the slave trade that led to the rupture of the mutual relations that hitherto existed thereby creating distrust between African rulers and their subjects. Walter Rodney explains how it happened:

> The rulers had a certain status and authority … they began to use their position to raid outside their societies as well as to exploit them internally by victimizing some of their own subjects. In the simplest of societies where there were no kings, it proved impossible for Europeans to strike up the alliance, which was necessary to carry on trade in captives on the coast.[11]

In many instances, during the period of the European slave trade, local authorities had to organize raids in their own communities for captives to be sold as slaves. And nearly every such raid was marked by brutality and violence. It, therefore, created social rifts between the people and the local state authorities while strengthening communal ties among them.

Consequently, the people's perception of the state began to shift from that of a protector to that of a predator, from trust to distrust, leaving the individuals with no option but to seek refuge and protection under kinship ties. The situation appears similar to the Nigerian experience during the Civil War when urban dwellers had to move "home", "home" being the village or one's primordial place of origin where vigilante groups were organized for protection. Turning back to the immediate community helped to create a sense of solidarity and, therefore, some distance from the larger society. What I am saying,

therefore, is that contrary to the general impression that European slave trade in Africa attenuated the kinship system, it did, in fact, help to strengthen primordial solidarity, thereby weakening the moral authority of kings and other political authorities. Colonial rule inherited this legacy, reinforced it and bequeathed it to post-colonial Africa.

Colonialism and Ethnicity

The advent of colonial conquest in Africa and its attendant result of urban migration, led, in some cases, to the transformation of what Horowitz aptly describes as "small, previously discrete ethnic groups into larger agglomerations, sometimes called super-tribes."[12] These emergent ethnic groups were composed of fragments of kinship entities, towns, villages or clans that had some initial historical ties, and were motivated by the desire to move into the political space as a platform that would enable them to compete with other groups for scarce resources. As the political landscape of Africa enlarged, some of these groups became very powerful, both materially and in terms of political influence. In a strict sense, the emergent ethnic groups were of a special character even though they derived from smaller kinship entities. They were more or less corporate groups or at best federations of ethnic groups defined more by political interests rather than by common descent.

The transformation from kinship to ethnicity has its greatest manifestation in countries like Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, etc., as Eghosa Osaghae rightly observes of the Nigerian case:

> "There were no ethnic groups before Nigeria became a corporate entity. What existed before that time were amorphous polities: many were organized around city-states, others in kingdoms and quasi-kingdoms, and yet others with the narrowness of villages with no conceptions of the wider political entities within which they were implicated. Even the language by which some claim to identify the ethnic group in modern Nigeria is to a large extent a product of this domain-partition ideology."[13]

No doubt, the Yoruba in South Western Nigeria comprised a relatively new federation of previously organized city-states, which had their own individual ethnic identities: Oyo, Egba, Ijebu, Ife, Ijesha, etc. So is the Igbo ethnic group a conglomeration of separate entities - Olu, Onitsha, Aro, etc., which originally did not share much of common ethnic identities. The Hausa was a formation from discrete tribal entities such as Daura, Katagum, Gwandu, Zazzau, etc. The new ethnic consciousness came into being at the dawn of politics and the struggle for power and scarce resources. Osaghae's study reveals a comprehensive network of the operations of ethnic associations, their influence and how they penetrate the social fabric of the Nigerian society, both rural and urban areas. The varieties include, the "Sunday-Sunday associations, the most intimate of which meet regularly on Sundays, ethnic gender associations, ethnic social clubs organized by the youths, establishment associations, organized around workplaces, pan-ethnic associations, and so on". In whatever dimension, the individual's sense of loyalty to the primordial entities grew stronger almost in inverse proportion to his commitment to the state.

That colonialism contributed to the expansion of ethnicity in Africa has never been a matter of dispute. The most common argument has been that it was convenient for colonial rulers to adopt the divide-and-rule tactics of organizing African societies along ethnic lines; that, in most cases, they encouraged the survival of ethnic sentiments by restoring African kings and chiefs to power through the methods of indirect rule. Some African

scholars put the indictment rather more directly, as O. Nnoli does, claiming that colonialism fabricated ethnicity to legitimize its rule and exploitation of Africa.[14] But Ali Mazrui was not as blunt as that, explaining that ethnicity was an outcome of the creation of nation states. "Bringing together divergent linguistic and cultural groups within the boundaries of a new nation has generated new levels of ethnic consciousness".[15]

There is a moral crisis in contemporary African society and it is a clear manifestation of the social distance existing between the individual and the state, the origin of which we have traced to the slave trade and subsequent imposition of colonial rule in Africa. It raises the important issue of loyalty, and perhaps also the question of legitimacy, as perceived by the individuals and the various sub-groups in post-colonial Africa. It is a situation in which loyalty is attracted towards the ethnic group rather than to the state, the moral and political authority of which has been weakened. In some cases, the individual's feelings about the state are never concealed. Even a state official in Nigeria would say without qualms that "Nigeria is not worth dying for".

The Idea of Civil Society

Loyalty is a reciprocal attitude. So, it is either won or lost on the basis of mutual exchange. In most African states, the responsibilities of the state have been virtually taken over by the primordial communities. They take care of the members' welfare needs, including the problems of birth and death; they construct roads, bridges and other infrastructure through self-help; build schools, hospitals, medical clinics and even provide financial support for their members in times of special need. As the African state increasingly abandons its civic responsibilities, so is its moral authority weakened. Indeed, this is a violation, by the state, of its contractual obligation to the citizens and no such state has the legitimate right to expect the loyalty of the people. And, as the losses of the state translate into the gains of the primordial unit, ethnicity continues to grow as a powerful force in the moral consciousness of Africans.

These peculiar circumstances of the African situation are often ignored by social scholars in their eagerness to apply Western theoretical models in matters relating to the individual, citizenship and the relationship between the state and civil society. Western societies already have an established model of the role of the individual in relation to the state. That relationship is defined mainly in terms of the meaning of citizenship. The citizen is perceived as an autonomous person who has willingly placed himself under certain implicit contractual obligations in the Hobbesian sense. Not only is the individual consciously aware of his rights; he expects and demands them from the state. The state, in return, accepts its responsibilities to the individual citizens. And it is on this implicit compact that the Western differentiation between state and civil society rests.

The idea of civil society is as complex as any other social construct and I cannot veer too far into the area by way of attempting a definition. In any case, its meaning changes from one scholar to another and from tradition to tradition. The commonest understanding of civil society, however, is that it is a depoliticized, free and autonomous public sphere in which individuals and associations conduct their affairs through the principle of social justice, unhindered by the state. Generally, the idea of civil society involves the presence of a moral consciousness, with individual rights taking priority over other obligations. There is, in addition, another important component of civil society as understood in Western literature, which Jean-Francois Bayart describes as its capacity to moderate the excesses of the state. A civil society is, according to him, "a society in relation with the state … in so far as it is in

confrontation with the state or more precisely, as the process by which society seeks to breach and counteract the simultaneous totalization unleashed by the state".[16]

In contemporary Africa, the notion of the individual as a citizen with rights and privileges in relation to the state is not one that flows freely in people's consciousness. Nor is the state perceived as an agent with obligations to the individual. In most cases, the state is perceived as the acquired property of powerful rulers, particularly in situations such as military dictatorship where there is hardly any sense of obligation to the citizen, unless it becomes necessary as a means of holding on to power. Herein lies the contrast between the state as understood in the West and the state as perceived in Africa. In the West, the state is the joint property of both the citizens and those in government, while in Africa the general perception is that the state belongs to the rulers.

I have discussed these peculiar characteristics of African social institutions so as to emphasize their historical origin. However, much as the effects of the past linger, the influence of contemporary global trends on Africa are also important. Like other human societies, contemporary Africa continues to be influenced by social and political changes taking place all over the world. So, whether or not there are disagreements in theoretical approaches, modern Africa cannot escape being a part of the global search for liberal democracy, equality, justice, freedom, human rights and the dignity of the human person. In fact, these qualities are highly cherished in Africa, although almost only within the primordial realm, as we have argued.

Global influences have led to the creation of new social institutions in contemporary Africa and those Western structures that permit the differentiation between state and civil society seem to be growing already in post-colonial Africa. And, as Bayart suggests, organizations such as the media, trade unions, student bodies, intellectuals, religious bodies and professional associations seem to be parts of an emerging civil society prepared to "confront and moderate" the excesses of the state. These modern elements in Africa should tap the reservoir of values in the primordial realm. Yet, civil society in Africa is in a severe crisis, especially in relation to peace building and conflict resolution.

Understanding Conflicts

The point of reviewing colonial scholarship at the beginning of this discussion has been to show how social anthropologists of the era served as the intellectual purveyors of colonial policies, but only as a subterfuge for creating divisions among Africans for the ease of administration. That goal was accomplished with the emergence of ethnic groups as powerful political forces driven by sectional interests. With such dichotomies created within groups – "sub-out-groups" versus "sub-in-groups", "them" versus "us" - other divisive forces emerged, as politicians continued to exploit fears and anxieties, with mere disagreements transformed into bitter conflicts, thereby escalating the drift from non-violent to violent conflicts.

The divisive agenda of colonial administration in Africa was accomplished in most cases through the application of a divide-and-rule (indirect rule) system and the creation of an ethnic structure that became a major source of social conflicts. The process was subtle, manipulative and intellectually crafted through an educational system adroitly organized to condition the minds of the colonized peoples. Commonly referred to as "colonial mentality", the mindset and internal dynamics so created, are never truly identified for what they are. Today, the challenge that faces the African researcher in peace and conflict studies is to uncover the true character of this mindset, both in its original form and as conditioned.

Every human group, whether traditional or modern, has its own frame

of reference (values, beliefs and perspectives) that gives it a stamp of identity. Theoretically, conflict ensues between contending groups when they pursue incompatible goals. Morton Deutsch defines incompatibility thus:

> An action that is incompatible with another prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures or in some ways makes the latter less likely to be effective … when there are incompatible or mutually exclusive goals or aims or values espoused by human beings … or perceived divergence of interest or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously."[17]

Whether a conflict is violent or non-violent depends on the degree of actual or perceived incompatibility. It also depends on the degree of polarisation and the extent to which the positions held are extreme. For instance, an extreme attachment within each of the groups easily elapses into polarity or the negation of other values and ultimately isolation of people of other groups. In other words, the stronger the solidarity within a group, the more forceful the propensity to the use of threat, anger and hatred against others. The frame of reference determines the degree of intensity of the conflict:

> Once we establish a certain frame of reference and cling to it as complete, it causes us to fix upon the real-objects, persons, group of people, events and so on by various – supposedly unchanging attributes, which turn non-violent conflict into violent one. …. When we build some particular thought and claim its completeness, that causes us to be dogmatic, exclusive and intolerant of other views. As fixed our idea of identity becomes strong and extreme, we become exclusive of other identities and take extreme behaviors against those with different attributes of identity[18]

The fact that groups subscribe to different values is not itself a problem. It is in the nature of human society to have discrete sub-units, each with its own cultural nuances. Problems arise only when members of the group are fixated; when they impute insurmountable differences and fail to see their own values, ideas and norms as just one set among alternatives; when they perceive theirs as right and anything belonging to others as wrong, and when they refuse to accommodate values other than theirs. To what extent does the African experience in social conflicts fit into this theoretical model?

Earlier in this discussion we said that the events of European and Arab slave trade in Africa helped to strengthen primordial solidarity while weakening the citizens' loyalty to the state. It was a trend inherited by colonialism which aggravated the situation by transforming the existing kinship units into larger ethnic groups, driven by restricted political interests. No doubt, in the period leading to political independence, leaders in most African countries were pulled together by patriotic feelings and agitations for political freedom. But, in spite of that pull, they were torn apart by animosities and hateful rivalries. In Nigeria, for instance, the divisive forces became manifest even before political independence. Politics and political formations were ethnic in character, membership and identity, so much so that within the first decade of independence, the conflicts that ensued had escalated to a series of military coup de tats and a Civil War (1967–1970).

Beyond the colonially induced social conflicts, the combined factors of scarce resources, religious bigotry, corruption and bad governance have made Africa a fertile ground for conflicts to sprout in almost all the sectors of the society. In Nigeria, the

negative effects of these forces became increasingly debilitating on the system in their encounter with "prebendal politics" as aptly described by Richard Joseph:

> The system of prebendal politics enables divergent groups and constituencies to seek to accommodate their interests … it grants legitimacy to a pattern of persistent conflicts and since its *modus operandi* is to politisize ethnic, religious and linguistic differences, it serves to make the Nigeria polity a simmering cauldron of un-resolvable tension over which a lid must be regularly clamped, and just as regularly removed[19].

Joseph's understanding of "prebendal politics" is conceptually similar to Peter P. Ekeh's "politics without morality" as articulated in the latter's brilliant doctrine of "two publics": "the primordial public which is moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm and the civil public which is amoral and lacks the genralised moral imperatives in the primordial public."[20] The only difference is that while Ekeh's emphasis is on a moral perspective, Joseph sees prebendalism in Africa as the direct consequence of failure of governance. Or, is it the failure of governance that is the consequence of prebendalism? – the chicken or egg dilemma!

Essentially, Joseph points out what happens when the state fails to regulate competition over scarce resources; when the political system fails to resolve religious differences peacefully and when issues of space allocation between farmers and herdsmen are allowed to degenerate into violent conflicts. He is saying that the citizens resort to self-help when law-enforcement agencies are perceived to be ineffective and unable to apprehend offenders, and when the judiciary fails to dispense justice. Each is an indication of how failure in governance creates further withdrawal of loyalty to the state and hence greater attachment to primordial sentiments.

It is important to stress the internal dynamics of conflicts. Ethnic feelings, prejudices and such other attitudes are the internal creations of the human mind, even when externally induced. There is, indeed, the Buddhist philosophical doctrine that the basic causes of virtually all the problems facing mankind reside in the conditioning of the human mind.[21] This is not to ignore external causes; it is to say that the common tendency to preoccupy ourselves with external factors such as physical violence, verbal wars, destructions, suffering, etc., blinkers us, very often, from an accurate understanding of the real causes of human actions.

The internal dynamics of conflict rests on the mindset as conditioned by the prevailing circumstances, world-views, cultural values, political orientation, religious beliefs and ethical norms. There are, of course, conceptual difficulties in differentiating between the internal and external dynamics of conflict. For instance, a person's political orientation may be the product of the dominant ideological system in his society just as his religious beliefs are shaped by the circumstances of his birth. Notwithstanding these conceptual issues, the fact remains that there can be no adequate understanding of a conflict without a full grasp of the mindset of the individual actors and the internal forces at play.

Cultural Universals

Given that the internal dynamics and mindset of contending parties are essential to our understanding of social conflicts, the researcher must probe into the complexities of human nature in relation to the imperatives of social life. On this, a number of questions readily come to mind. Is there anything like human nature? If so, is man, by nature, good, peaceful and cooperative, or is he naturally evil, aggressive and conflict–prone? As to be

expected, answers to these questions have been as diverse as there are analysts.

While it makes sense to say that there are certain qualities – whatever they may be – that can be consistently attributed to the human person, the specific question as to whether man is naturally good or evil, peaceful or aggressive, presupposes that human nature is fixed, which contrasts with experience. It is, I believe, more tenable to say that man has the propensities to qualities x, y and z and that what he becomes depends on environmental conditions rather than talk of some immutable unchanging qualities. The more relevant question to ask is whether or not there are what the renowned French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, describes as "cultural universals" by which he means features that exist in all human cultures yet vary from culture to culture. Durkheim and a host of other sociologists after him believe in the universality of mankind. They claim that human beings and, indeed, human societies are the same, whether traditional or modern, simple or complex, developed or developing. Being the same means that these qualities are shared in common by all men such that together they determine the course of human action and the destiny of society. Although almost impossible to list, cultural universals include qualities/values such as cognitive abilities, desires for social contact, fairness and justice, freedom, romance, honour, status and integrity, family, gender roles, survival (life), eating, power, language, religion, dance, jokes, etc. – the collectivity of which sociologists refer to as "the human condition". It inconceivable that there is a human person or society without any of these core values. Yet, while each may be a necessary condition, none is a sufficient condition for being human:

> All human beings desire and enjoy peace and security. They want the good of life and a peaceful and secure atmosphere within which to pursue their legitimate aspirations. Nobody wants war, anarchy or disorder because these portend danger to life and property. Nobody wants to leave his home and become a refuge within or outside his country. Nobody wishes to die of hunger, disease, or starvation which follows internal or international wars[22].

It is claimed that human experience testifies to each of these universally shared attributes. But, Kwasi Wiredu, the renowned Ghanian philosopher, thinks that it is unnecessary resorting to empirical experience as the existence of cultural universals is so self-evident that it does not require any empirical justification. He, therefore, proceeds with a *reductio ad absurdum* argument for this. "Suppose there were no cultural universals. Then inter-cultural communication would be impossible. But there is inter-cultural communication. Therefore, there are cultural universals".[23] The affirmation, by empirical and *a priori* arguments, of cultural universals is in contrast to the dominant views of colonial anthropologists, to the effect that there is a difference in kind between European world-views, thought systems and forms of life, on the one hand and those of Africa, on the other.

I contend that the essentials of human culture are basically the same everywhere while their modes of expression, interpretation and practice vary, depending on environmental circumstances, both physical and social. It is a universal fact that every human group speaks a language, but what particular language it speaks, whether English or Isoko, is circumstantially determined. Researchers and adventures are yet to discover a society that does not practice one form of religion or the other, but whether a given society practices Christianity or Islam, depends on its social history and circumstances.

More fundamentally, and for the benefit of African researchers in peace and conflict studies, every human society has its own peculiar experience and theoretical model for explaining its world of commonsense, but the particular explanatory model adopted, whether scientific or supernatural, is determined by its environmental and historical experience. The point, therefore, is that all human societies have their own share of cultural universals while each group applies its own particular perspectives and interpretations. In all, the particulars are an expression of the universals such that the former derive meaning and coherence from the latter.

The researcher in peace and conflict studies must be conversant, not only with the mindsets, profiles and cultural backgrounds of those parties to a conflict, he should be knowledgeable about both the cultural universals as well as the particulars. More important, the researcher should be cognizant of the world-views, thought systems and, therefore, the dominant explanatory models of all the parties to a conflict. In Africa, for instance, the causes of any phenomenon, incident or action, fall into two major categories which I have described elsewhere,[24] as primary and secondary causes directed at the "why" and "how" questions in relation to the explanation of illness and medical healing.

> Primary causes of illness are those predisposing factors not directly explicable in causal terms. Some of these take the form of supernatural entities such as deities, spirits and witches; others are stresses due to either the victim's contravention of communal morality or his strained relationship with other persons within the community. Secondary causes involve direct caused connection similar to the cause-effect relation of the germ theory in orthodox modern medicine

The seemingly incompatibility between the two categories of causes dissolves, considering that they are answers to different questions. Primary causes, which involve the evocation of the supernatural and communal relations, are the internal dynamics at play in the analysis of conflicts in Africa. Are conflict's opponents perceived as spiritual adversaries and how deep-seated are such feelings? Cultural nuances of this sort must be addressed by the African scholar in his research into social conflicts.

Conclusion

In Africa, research efforts in peace and conflict studies are likely to continue to suffer from the consequences of the damage done, by the historical events of the slave trade and colonialism, to the social institutions responsible for the preservation and promotion of cultural values. The emergence of ethnicity is one such consequence. The arguments in our discussion converge on the point that the damage, so caused by the two epochal events, has been further reinforced by colonial scholarship in creating an African social form, driven by a conditioned mindset that is prone to social conflicts. And, contrary to the presumed cultural relativism espoused in colonial literature, mankind is, indeed, defined by cultural universals, comprising core human values, goals and aspirations.

Beyond the frontiers of this discussion, I dare say that that world history and recent global developments show clearly the commonalities that bind the human race, although punctuated by environmentally determined variations. Colonial history and wars of conquest, whether in Europe, America or Africa, have demonstrated these inherent human tendencies/cultural universals and their modes of deployment in the pursuit of individual or cooperate goals. The human values that caused racism in Europe and

America are not essentially different from those that created apartheid in South Africa. Nor are they different, unfortunately, from the values that fuel ethnicity today in Nigeria or the divisive anti-globalization policy of Donald Trump's America.

The message, therefore, to the social researcher in Africa, especially students of peace and conflict studies, is first, to clear the heaps of intellectual distortions caused by European scholarship and search for an alternative model of analysis, informed by a universally acceptable concept of human nature, always bearing in mind the core values that unite us as members of the human species.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Aidan Southhall, "The Illusion of Tribe," in *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa,* Peter C.W. Gutkind, ed., Leiden: Netherland, E.J. Brill, 1970, p.47

[2] Published in 1986 by the University of California Press, Berkeley

[3] H.R. Trevor-Roper, quote taken from *West Africa* (Weekly), Jan. 18, 1964, p.58

[4] In the 1990s, there emerged, among social anthropologists, a powerful postmodernist movement that was questioning the fundamental principles of the colonial and early post-colonial periods. Ernest Gellner characterizes this movement as a form of "permissive relativism" and "a manifestation by the West of a wish for atonement from the "sins" of colonialism." See his *Postmodernism Reason and Religion,* Routledge, New York: 1992.

[5] Daniel P. Moynihan, *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics,* Oxford University Press, 1993, p.54.

[6]Published by Cambridge Mass: M.I.T. press, 1963

[7] Moynihan, *Pandaemonium*, Op. cit., p.22.

[8] See B.S. Philipotts, *Kindred and Clan in the Middle Ages and After: A study in the sociology of the Teutonic Races,* Cambridge University Press, 1913; P. Maranda, *French Kinship: Structure and History,* The Hague: Mouton, 1974, and A.C. Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure: Studies in Law and Society in Antiquity and the Early Midlle Ages,* Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983.

[9] Leonard Plotnicov, "Rural-Urban Communication in Contemporary Nigeria: The Persistence of Traditional Social Institutions", in *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa,* edited by P.C. W Gutkind, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970, p.68.

[10] J.D. Page, for instance, does not believe that harmony and social equality were major attributes of African societies prior to European slave trade. See his "Slavery and Slave Trade in the Context of Western African History," *Journal of African History,* Vol. 10, 1969, pp. 393-404.

[11] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1966.

[12] Donald L. Horowith, "Ethnic Identity" in Glazer N. and Moynihan, D.P. (eds.) *Ethnicity: Theory and Practice,* Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975, p.126.

[13]E. Osaghae, Towards a fuller Understanding of Ethnicity in Africa: Bringing Rural Ethnicity Back in", in E. Osaghae (ed.) *Between State and Civil Society in Africa,* Darkar: Published by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA) 1994.

[14] O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria,* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1975, p.126.

[15]Ali A. Mazrui, "Ethnic Stratifications and the Military – Agrarian Complex: The Uganda Case", in Glazer, N. and Moynihan (eds.) op. cit. p.447.

[16] Jean-Francois Bayart, "Civil Society in Africa" in *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power,* ed. P. Chabal, Cambridge: University Press, 1986, p.111.

[17] Morton Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict, Constructive Processes,* gutted taken from T. A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey and Judith Burdin Asuni (eds.) *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case,* Spectrum Books Ltd, Ibadan, 2002, pp. 9-10

[18] Juichiro Tanabe, "Buddhist Philosophy of the Global mind for sustainable Peace", in *Dialogue and Universalism: Journal of the International Society for Universal Dialogue,* Vol. xxvii, No. 2, 2017, pp.17-30
[19] Richard A Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (African Studies) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.10
[20] Peter P. Ekeh "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement", in *Corporative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 17, No. 1, 1975, p.92
[21] Juichiro Tanabe, op. cit. p.22
[22] Osisioma BC Nwolise, "Principles, Culture and Values: Influences on Nigeria's Role in International Peace and Security" in Chris A. Garuba (ed.) *International Peace and Security: The Nigerian Contribution,* a publication of the National War College, Abuja, 1997, pp.32-40
[23] Kwasi Wiredu, "Are There Cultural Universals?" in *The Monist,* vol.78, No.1, January, 1995, p.52
[24] Godwin Sogolo, "On a Socio-Cultural Conception of Health and Disease" in *AFRICA, Rivista trimestrale di studi e documntazione dell'Istituto,* Italo-Africano, ANNO XLI N.3 SETTEMBRE, 1986,
[25] Ibid, pp.398-99. Also see my "The Concept of cause in African Thought", in Coetzee P.H. and Roux A.P.J. (eds.) *Philosophy from Africa,* Oxford University Press, Cape Town, South Africa, 2002, pp.192-199.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Mauro, P. "Corruption and Growth", in *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 1995, 110(3), pp.681-712.

2. Easterly, W. and R. Levine "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Politics and Ethnic Division", *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 1987, 112(4), pp.1203-1250.

3. La Porta, R., Lopez-de-Silanes, F., Shleifer A and R. Vishny "The Quarterly of Government", *Journal of Law, Economics and Organisation,* 1999, vol.15, pp.222-279.

4. Treisman, D. "The Causes of Corruption: A Cross-national Study", *Journal of Public Economics,* 2000, 76(3), pp.399-457, and

5. Alesina, A., Devlees chaauwer, A., Easterly, W., Kurlat S., and Wacziarg, R. "Fractionalization", *Journal of Economic Growth,* 2003 8(2) pp.155-194.