

Building Bridges or Barricades: Interrogating Ethnic Identities in Africa

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Abstract

African states have experienced multiple crises. The most devastating one is political. This is the inability to evolve a viable system that is suitable for the management of our daily social experiences. It is this failure that has generated many other problems in other spheres. These problems, in concert, have made the atmosphere in today's Africa that of frustration, despair and disappointment, which are largely responsible for the so many crises of adversarial politics.

Specifically, it is what is responsible for the affirmation of parochial identities and ethnic strife at the detriment of the rather transcendental national identity in contemporary Africa states. But, why have the affirmation of sectional identities and its attendant conflicts remain daunting, intricate and resilient, in spite of the attempts to create a higher culture to transcend it? Or is it that the attempts have been that of a square peg in a round hole?

This paper will employ the conceptual, analytic-descriptive and reconstructive methods to examine the above and related questions. This will involve the use of indigenous management strategies in a manner many scholars have ignored. It is, therefore, expected that this paper will initiate a perspective, that is, a re-assessment of extant interpretations of the clash of ethnic identities in Africa.

Key words – Africa, Ethnic identity, Higher culture, Political elite, Indigenous management.

Introduction

Any contemporary discourse in Africa that undermines the post-colonial dimension in the explication of its experiences will be running against its historiography. Postcolonial experiences here concern the activities of its interrelated periods, which in concert, determine and shape the future and destiny of African people both within the continent and in the diaspora. The periods we identify here are the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial. Any discussion of the African condition without due recognition of the interrelated activities of these periods will obviously be wrong-headed. So, our arguments in this work will take into cognizance the events of these periods and how they have together generated disappointment, frustration, despair and consequently, parochial identities in Africa today.

The attempt in this study is to analyse the factors that have, in concert, contributed to the multiple crises in African socio-cultural and political landscape. The most devastating of these in my opinion is the political. This is the inability to evolve a viable system that is suitable for the management of our daily social experiences. It is this failure that has generated many other problems in other spheres. These problems, together, have made the atmosphere in Africa that of frustration, which are largely responsible for the so many crises of adversarial politics.

Truly, this is what is responsible for the affirmation of parochial identities and ethnic strife at the detriment of the rather transcendental national identity in contemporary African States. But, why have the affirmation of sectional identities and its attendant conflicts remain daunting, intricate and resilience, in spite of the attempts to create a higher culture to transcend it? Why have the myth of common ancestry, religion and tribe among other primordial attachments, become the reasons for socio-political alliances and so, the basis for the affirmation of narrow identities in contemporary Africa?

It has become pertinent to examine these questions today, if only to provide an appropriate perspective to understanding the nature of African present sordid condition and how we got to this level of our predicament. For unless we know the real nature of our problems, we may not be able to provide appropriate solutions to them. Many have described the African state as been at the verge of collapse. Some have even in the same breath considered the present generation of Africans as failures. All these are as a result of the fact that African political leaders and their followers are unable to manage themselves, their societies and their resources. The question is: why are things falling apart in Africa?

In this essay, I am interrogating these questions in a way scholars that have dwelled on the African crises have tended to ignore. I have done so because of the belief that the resources in ideas, techniques, and in some respect, values offered by certain traditions may not suffice to explicate or unearth the complexities of the nature of the African predicament. This is so because sometimes whatever we do may be controlled by, or at least affected by our assumptions even though we are most of the time unconscious of them.

What is beginning to appear here is the need to seek for local solution to African problems since the problems have become resilient in spite of the several attempts to arrest them. This local solution, I believe, is based on the facts that cultural values do not operate in vacuum. Cultural values are tied to other pre-suppositions in the society, which can only be understood and measured after we have laid bare the systems of knowledge, values and symbols that structure the minds of the people in Africa. The point here is the promotion of the understanding of African belief systems through the exposition of their logical structures and the assumptions on which they stand. What this explains is that our values depend on certain beliefs and practices of the society that provide the framework within which human experience is interpreted. In view of this and in particular, the role culture plays in the organisation of our social and political lives, the application of external solution in mediating African crises may be the reason for its daunting nature. But what is the local solution to this African predicament?

Before we go into this, let us see how these problems, especially ethnic crises, are generated.

In the discourse of African crises, one factor that easily comes to mind is the issue of ethnic conflict. The argument in the literature is that the cause of ethnic strife in Africa is the socio-cultural configuration of Africa or the fact of the divisive tendency of ethnic or tribal plurality (see Nnoli, 1989; Osaghae, 1993; 1995; Oyugi, 1992) or as Uroh says, the divisive tendency is the product of the way ethno-cultural groups have as a result of colonialism, become chaotically crammed within the various African states, and consequently what has put the continent on the boil. Against this background is the view that divisive structure of ethnic groups is one of the several manifestations of a more fundamental problem on the socio-political landscape in Africa (Uroh, 1988:). This is that ethnic conflict in Africa is a product of the failure of the states in Africa to justify their existence by pursuing the common good of the people. This is to say that it is because the states failed to fulfil her obligation that has made the citizens to seek social fulfilments in their primordial enclaves.

My contention here is the development of these two dominant views on the question of ethnic conflicts in Africa. By development, I mean, whichever way we may want to look at the two opposing views above, they do not undermine the fact of the existence of diverse ethnic groups and the fact that from time to time, these groups conflict with one another. Our concern is not with the problem of what has been identified as regime legitimation (Uroh, 1998:94), but rather that of how, in spite of the diversity of ethnic groupings and their attendant conflicts, we can harmonise our differences and live like brothers. I am of the view that it is only after we have effectively managed our differences that the whole question of the legitimacy of the state can be meaningful. This is to say that even if the state is responsive to the common good of the people, because of the socio-cultural differences in African societies; social relations will not annihilate ethnic conflicts. In other words, "because our societies comprise a multitude of religions, ethnic groups with competing interests, values and needs, conflict is inevitable and natural to most societies (West Africa, 1996: 939). If conflict is inevitable in this sense, "the challenge is how to develop within

African political processes, institutions and cultures that can mediate these competitions peacefully, routinely in a way that does not plunge our society into the spiral of conflict and violence (Ibid, 938). This is because societies throughout the world, which are stable, are not those with the absence of conflicts, but rather those that are able to manage conflicts in stable ways. But, how can we routinely and peacefully mediate ethnic conflict in Africa? I shall return to this in the latter part of this work. Let me explicate how these conflicts are generated.

It is significant to note from the outset that conflicts are inevitable and natural to all human societies as long as we are constituted differently and our attitudes and behaviours sharpened by our geography and social systems. Many answers, no doubt, contest for attention as to how conflicts are generated in Africa. Our concern here is what we may call the colonial dimension in the African predicament and the implication of this on social solidarity.

There is no doubt about the fact that ideas vary about the structures and institutions bequeathed to us by our colonizers. It has been suggested that it is not the case that ethnic crisis in Africa is a product of the way ethnic groups were, as a result of colonial conquest, chaotically crammed into African states (Ake, 1993:32; Uroh, 1998:98). The reasoning is that to assert the above is to say that there is something inherently conflictual about social or cultural pluralism (Ebijuwa, 2000:85). This is because there are some culturally plural societies that do not have or are not as crisis-ridden as we find in Africa (see Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire, Somali, DR Congo, Rwanda etc). Yes, this is correct, but it is equally misleading in the sense that if we look at the issue in this light, we are likely to overlook the intention of colonizers concerning state formation and its implication for social cohesion. For Oladipo (1998:108), what the colonizers did with regard to state formation was to combine the "territories of formally distinct people to form colonial territories" and in the words of Eme Awa (1996:21), "the colonial systems and the political processes of both the pre-and-post-independence era turned the normal cultural differences into debilitating ethnic cleavages. Poorly formulated and inefficiently executed economic policies over the past 50 years caused the retardation of certain areas and

thereby tended to aggravate tension along ethnic lines in many countries". This was done because the colonizers needed to separate the spheres of influence of different European rulers (Ade Ajayi, 1992:8). To put this differently, the aim of the colonizers was not the creation of new states in the colonies for social and economic development, rather, in the words of Oladipo, the demarcation was meant to "ensure colonial control and dispossession could be achieved without undue rivalry among colonizers..." (Ibid). Hugh Clifford, Nigeria's Colonial Governor in the 1920s, also attests to the fact that the ideas of the "cramming together of territories of formally distinct people to form colonial territories was deliberate policy of the colonizers. He told the members of the National Council for British West Africa that he was:

Convinced of the rights, for example, of the people of Egbaland... of any of the great emirates of the north... to maintain that each one of them is a nation... (and that) it is the task of the government of Nigeria to build and fortify these national institutions (cited in Coleman, 1958: 194).

The above indicate the colonizer's recognition of the differences of the many ethnic groups they crammed together, the implication of which was the dispossession of the people of those values and practices, which hitherto served as vehicles for social identity and solidarity. This situation Yaya Abubakar (Awa, 1996:1) says is characterised by the total collapse of moral consciousness or what he calls the result of a deep contamination of the original human-centred African communal philosophy, which unavoidably led to a continuous decay of the African socio-political framework which is now aggravated by exponential decline in economic viability" (see preface of Awa, 1996 :1). The point of this "cultural and social dispossession" was to put the people of the colonies under a form of control that would make them unable to question colonial practices and the assumptions on which they were based" (Oladipo, 1998:108). To do the contrary, for the colonialists, would mean to "mould one citizenry from the many people", which will amount to the formulation of policies whose implementation would be geared towards development of a new consensus among the various peoples they brought together to form a new colonial territories" (Ibid). This is an option the colonizers were not prepared to accept because it could

eventually be used to question the legitimacy of their authority. Hence, the colonizers adopted the divide and rule system in their territories, which sufficiently disunited the people in their colonies. Again, this is how Governor Clifford presented this point when he said that, his administration would seek to secure:

to each separate people the right to maintain its identity, its individuality and its nationality, its chosen form of government, and the peculiar political and social institutions, which have been evolved for it by the wisdom and the accumulated experiences of generations of its forbearers (cited in Coleman, p. 198).

This emphasis on the separation of ethnic groups created a new sense of communal consciousness and identity for the people where none existed, and provided a new symbolic and ethnocentric focus for each group. This of course, did not only complicate the task of wielding diverse elements in each colony into a coherent whole, it also became the “source of many life threatening conflicts, which were to proliferate, and consequently impede the process of community development and social solidarity, in many African countries, a few decades after independence” (Oladipo, 1998:109). We have examples of these conflicts in states like Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Zaire, Rwanda, Cote-d’Ivoire, Sierra-Lone, and Nigeria among others. In all, we can say that the “divide and rule” mechanism adopted by the European colonizers widened the social distance among the communal groups, consequently reinforcing the ethnocentric factor in the emergence of ethnicity.

Although, colonialism as a system was exploitative and oppressive of the African people and their resources, it also created a bourgeoisie class in Africa in the form of nationalists whose policies and activities are partly the source of ethnic conflicts in Africa. When many African states gained independence, the nationalists that took over the mantle of leadership from the colonialists were not only “interested in replacing Europeans in leading positions of power and privileges” (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1984(a):76), they created opportunities for themselves and their cronies that enabled them to plunder the resources of the states and made sure that existing opportunities and benefits in the states were reserved for themselves and

people from their ethnic or tribal enclaves. This is how Nzongola-Ntalaja poignantly put this view in his *The Crisis in Zaire*:

It is the national ruling class itself that constitute the principal obstacle to economic growth and development through the privatisation of the state, depriving it of those essential means and capabilities within which to generate economic growth, improve the living conditions of the masses...(1987(a): 9).

Mobutu represents one of those Nzongola-Ntalaja says plundered the economy of their states for personal benefits. As documented in a monthly magazine, the report says:

since he came to power, Mobutu has been alleged to hold about US \$4 billion in a numbered Swiss Bank account he owns. Documentary evidence of the extent of corruption also testified to the fact that Mobutu, his family and friends own twenty-six extensive properties in Belgium and France ... (quoted from Adesina, 1998: 83).

In Nigeria, the story is not completely different from that of Mobutu. In the case of Nigeria, for a very long time, the North that used to control the seat of power, used that opportunity to promote itself by the initiation execution of policies and programmes that secure key positions in the politico-economic spheres of the country. This move was supported by the much disputed Federal Character clause in the 1979 Constitution (section 14(3)a), which is meant to regulate any imbalance in the distribution of opportunities and benefits. Unlike the principles of affirmative action in the United States, which was meant to compensate certain groups of people because of wrong done to them in the past, the Nigerian situation can not be said to have semblance of the American story. The reason being that no group can be said to have wronged the other and so, as Bodunrin says: cannot be described as victims of past discriminatory government or social policies; by any group. Here, there is no guilty group, which is normally bound to make reparation for past misdeeds (1989: 304). Hence, to use the principle of Federal Character clause to distribute opportunities and benefits as it is being done in Nigeria; generates confusion in the sense that those that were not so placed or were not represented in the scheme of things inevitably feel alienated from the state. The result of

which is the complete lack of confidence in the state. And as the state becomes derelict in its responsibility to the citizens, that is, being unable to provide for the common good of its citizens, they gradually withdraw into their tribal or ethnic enclaves for social fulfilment. This withdrawal is occasioned by the conscious or sentimental connection of the people to their values, especially their communal way of life. When individuals recoil into their ethnic enclaves like this, we can then say that “moral bond” that tied the citizens to the state, the real basis upon which the state could justify its power over the citizen, has slacken, if not totally cut (Uroh, 1998:101). What happens here is that the state is “no longer at ease”, things have really fallen apart”, that is, a kind of social dislocation.

In this circumstance, frustration, mutual distrust and complete hatred become the order of the day. What follows is a complete disregard for the state and consequently the state becomes an arena of ethnic conflicts; where social relationships can no longer generate “important common goals, interests and values in terms of which a sense of neighbourliness can be developed among them and national identity forged” (Oladipo, 1998: 115).

Now, if our fore-going discussions of the social predicament of the African state are anything to go by, it is obvious that the situation we are in today’s Africa is that of uncertainty and despair. The question here is: how do we generate this “important common goals, interests and values that will lead to the evolution of national identity that transcend primordial attachments and other forms of socio-political alliances?”

BEYOND ETHNIC IDENTITIES: LOCAL SOLUTIONS

The attempt here is to create a higher culture that transcends these plural identities. It should be noted from the outset that central to the realisation of the needs and interests of diverse groups, is the need to ensure healthy harmonisation of the differences of all ethnic groups in Africa by allowing even representations not only in decision-making but also in the distribution of benefits and opportunities. This is what Kwasi Wiredu calls “formal representation” (1995: 58). But this in itself can also generate disaffection among the groups as it is likely for one group to “place any one

group of persons consistently in position of minority whose right to representation is periodically violated” (Oladipo, 1998: 116). Here, representation in decision-making body as we find in western democracy cannot guarantee healthy relationship without ensuring the representation of the *will* of the representatives in decision-making. To achieve this requires that we shift our platform of discourse.

The point of this shift is to ensure that the pursuit of individual or group interests through the oppression and exploitation of others are discouraged. A kind of consensual democracy to use Wiredu’s terms, where opinions of all the ethnic groups in the state can be harmonised. We may not be able to arrive at this form of consensus without the existence of a democratic atmosphere that will ensure the full representation of all ethnic groups. Here, we are not referring to western type of democracy where the game of number is highly prized. This is so because the conception of democracy that emphasises majority rule constantly put “some groups periodically to be substantively unrepresented minorities (Wiredu, 1995: 58). Thus, rather than promoting co-operation among ethnic groups, this form of democratic arrangement generates conflicts and disaffection among the groups.

In what follows, my approach here following Wiredu is a shift from the western model of democratic arrangement because it is inadequate and at variance to African democratic aspirations. This inadequacy is a result of the fact that the western democratic tradition does not square properly with Africa’s “specific historical institutional forms of democratic practice” (Ake, 1992: 6). Is there anything wrong, for example, with our devising creatively new institutional forms and practices relevant to African political experiences yet imbibing the values and principles of democracy? For example, it is possible for us to “accept the necessity of pluralism without necessarily adopting the criteria for differentiating between the pluralities (Ibid). The idea here is to say that we can conceptualise political formation that can be based on tribal or ethnic groups, communities or nationalities rather than political parties. This is because of the reason that political parties can be said to be in the interest of national solidarity, political security and progressive consciousness flies in the face of the fact that

African societies are notable for their primary group loyalty, and multi-nationalities (Ibid).

The problem one can imagine from this is that of whether such social formations are not sources of social cleavages or group solidarity and potential conflict, especially as it can be exploited by political elites for their self-centred goals. One cannot undermine the possibility of this problem. Yet, to ignore such important social pluralism is problematic for Africa's socio-political development because it cannot be mediated if we do not see them as vehicles of political expression. For, to overlook it may elicit some form of "anomic interest articulation, communal violence and centrifugal tendencies..." (Ibid) as we find in many African states today. Hence, it is my opinion that any viable democratic arrangement for the resolution of conflicts in Africa must reflect the socio-cultural and historical realities of African societies. What we require as Wiredu suggests, is a democratic framework that is based on consensus as it is practised in many traditional African settings. For instance, the Akan of Ghana. By consensus, we mean:

a condition in which two or more persons or group(s): concerned with decisions...about which conflict might occur, are in appropriate agreement in their belief about what decision should be made and have some feeling of unanimity with each other and with the society as a whole ... (Sills, 1986: 260).

The idea of consensus here, presupposes, among other things the "original position of diversity" (Wiredu, 1995: 54) or disagreement. The essence of the practice of democratic consensus is to transcend the conflicting positions in such a way that all the parties involved in a dispute "are able to feel that adequate account has been taken of their point or view in any proposed scheme of future action of co-existence" (Ibid, 57).

From the fore-going, we can identify two advantages of this form of political system that is based on consensus. First, because the democratic arrangement will be such that it will have to be representative of all such opinions. Secondly, since all ethnic groups will be fully represented, decisions that will be arrived at will through "dialogic confrontation" to use Bakhtin's phrase, be based on consensus. The point of the adoption of this framework is to ensure that in "working out solutions in a situation of

conflict of opinions or disagreement, account should be taken of all the interests involved” (Wiredu, 1995: 54). By this we mean the smoothing of edges, or the sorting out of differences to arrive at what Ali Mazrui has called shared images (p.399). This is possible, Mazrui says because images grow, are modified, interconnect with other images through what he called rational discourse. In other words, it is through rational discourse that we arrive at what may be considered suitable to all.

Here, what is suitable does not necessarily mean what is consented to, rather, it is what is considered existentially beneficial through dialogue and mutual agreement among parties in dispute. In this way, agreement of all parties makes it impossible that a minority might be excluded in the process of decision-making, as in the case of multi-party system. This, as Anke Graness says secures a “substantial representation of interest” of members in a dispute (2002:256).

As we have said earlier, basing decision-making in plural societies on majority opinions places some people permanently out of the scheme of things. This invariably leads to the imposition of the majority views on the minority ethnic groups; the result of which is the denial of basic needs, opportunities and benefits. This majoritarian kind of decision-making is what is responsible for the well-known inclemency of adversarial politics in Africa. The Niger-Delta crisis in Nigeria is a case in point! The minority ethnic groups in the Niger-Delta where a substantial amount of the oil wealth of Nigeria is generated today suffer socio-economic and ecological problems because those who control the political power have neglected the “hen that lays the golden egg”. The powerful majority groups use their position to exploit the offices of the state rather than its transformation. This, as we see in Nigeria today, in spite of the palliatives of amnesty provided can hardly ameliorate the levels of suffering of the people in the means of plenty. This, consequently, generates a kind of alienation that destroys the foundation of any social solidarity.

The point then of the management of ethnic conflicts through consensus is to eliminate the problem inherent in the practice of keeping some people or groups permanently out of schemes designed to resolve conflicts in which they are involved. Put differently, any state that adopts this principle of consensual democracy in the resolution of ethnic conflicts stands to benefit because that would ensure that all the “voices” of the diverse groups would be heard, and through conversation (not confrontation), to use Rawlsian phrase, will come to a unanimous decision. Here, “unanimity and all the rigorous processes and compromises that lead to it are all efforts made to contain the wishes ... (Nwala, 1981: 168) of the majority and the minority ethnic groups in the state. In fact, it is designed to arrive at the “general will of the people in conflicts” (Ibid). In other words, consensus becomes desirable not as a means through which the majority imposes its will on others but as the “process of regulating normal life among brothers” (loc cit.).

Now, since our consensual model of democracy presupposes a situation where claims and counter-claims can be heard and consequently resolving conflicting claims in a non-violent manner, it means that such democratic arrangement is characterised by undistorted communication among the participants as well as tolerance of each other’s views. It also means that the participants in this arrangement deliberate on issues under a condition of equal advantage. The fact that representatives of ethnic groups are equal, at least in terms of the status in the course of discussions, provides an opportunity for a fair deliberation. The outcome of this deliberation is likely to be acceptable to all parties involved. In the contrary, then, decisions can be reached through voting by all representatives. The idea of voting here should not be confused, Wiredu says with decision-making principle of the supreme right of the majority. This is because in Wiredu’s words that “consensus as a decision procedure, requires, in principle, that each representative should be persuaded, if not of the optimality of each decision, at least of its practice necessity, all things considered” (1995: 62).

This is to say that the parties whose views do not prevail have been made to see reasons with those whose views are accepted. In other words, “they prevail upon them to accept the decision arrived at, not just to live with it” (Ibid). This is not a case of the oppression of the weak groups by the strong as such; rather, what we have is a case of one group convincing the other to see the practical necessity of its points. We need to add at this point that decisions through *rational conversation* of this sort would enjoy the support of all ethnic groups. This is so because the whole process involves that all representatives operate under a condition of equal advantage and the toleration of all shades of opinion in decision-making. In fact, we can say the decision reached in the whole and the contributions of all stakeholders are the parts, which is the totality of the ideas. This view as Manuskhani avers can be equated with postmodernists absolute or metanarratives (2002). For, such totalizing views, experience have shown, only marginalizes certain cultures or sectors within a culture that holds such metanarratives. Wholeness therefore, is simply a standpoint, a reference point, in which various views about the issue at stake are perceived as interconnected, and interdependent. They are not connected by a single metanarrative, but by common human concerns with family semblance among them (Manuskhani 2001:190). This wholeness can be described metaphorically as follows:

the universe (can be) described as a vast net, and at each junction where the meshes meets sits a jewel. Each jewel reflects the light of all around it, and all of those jewels reflect others around them. In this way, the whole universe of jewels is ultimately reflected in every single jewel. (ibid)

CONDITIONS FOR THE PRACTICAL REALISATION OF AGREEMENT

But what are the conditions for the practical realisation of this form of “wholeness”. To put it in another way, what are the conditions that will create the atmosphere for a sustainable consensus of ideas? We have earlier stated that the idea of rational consensus presupposes the existence of disagreement. And that the resolution of this disagreement involves an encounter between the parties in disputes who are willing to transcend their

differences to a position of consensus. Such encounter cannot exist in an atmosphere of the domination of one party by the other. This is to say that in this dialogic situation there is no privilege opinion. All opinions are subject to rigorous deliberation until those that may much in terms of truth are accepted. In other words, “dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one party depositing ideas in another (Freire, 1970:61). As an act, which denounces the relation of demonation, dialogue is a task of responsible people who operate in an arena of freedom.

Beside the issue of freedom to express one’s view, dialogue as the common task of transcending differences cannot exist without humility or what Francis Deng called the Reaching out Principle in his essay titled: “Reaching Out: A Dinka Principle of Conflict Management”. This is to say that if a party considers itself over and above the other(s), or that it has the monopoly of knowledge or truth, what we find will be a case of one party manipulating the discourse for its own advantage. For example, “if I am tormented and disturbed by the possibility of being displaced or if I am close to and even offended by the contribution of others; how can there be dialogue? (Ebijuwa 2004:75). This is to say that in an atmosphere of dialogue, we must develop the attitude of tolerance while admitting the fact that it is possible for previously held views to change. This is how Deng succinctly put this view in his discussion of the Missiraya Arab tribes of southern Kordofan in Western Sudan thus:

Chief Babo Nimir told of a peace conference between his tribe and the Rezeigat, another tribe in the Western province of Darfur. A Missiriya had killed a man from Rezeigat. According to Missiriya custom, blood wealth was thirty head of cattle, while among the Rezeigat, it was one hundred. A negotiation on the price was dead locked. “We spent that whole day without result”. Babo Nimir reports (Deng 1982, 21): “We spent the night. The following morning, we withdrew and reviewed our position. I was the one who spoke with the Mamour. I said, ‘Here we are, stuck at 30. Our position, I believe is wrong. We are basing our argument on our own custom within our tribe. Conflicts within one tribe are not the same as conflicts between separate tribes”. His position moderated the demands of the Razeigat and a

compromise was reached at ten cows, with one bull for the burial cloth, setting a precedent at 71 cows.

This resolution does not only rest on the humility of the Missirage tribe but that the Principle of Reaching Out is a bridging function that involves magnanimity and generosity rather than weakness.

In addition to the above, dialogue requires an intense faith in one another. Without the initial faith in the possibility to transcend our differences there cannot be dialogue. To put this differently, faith in one another, “is an apriori requirement for dialogue: the dialogical man believes in other man even before he meets them face to face.

Founding itself on freedom, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between discussants is the logical consequence. It would amount to contradiction. In terms of dialogue based on freedom, humility and faith does not create the atmosphere of mutual trust that will eliminate imposition of ideas. As Freire puts it:

Trust is contingent in the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intention; it cannot exist if any party's words do not coincide with his actions. To say one thing and do another to take one's word lightly cannot inspire trust (1970:61)

This is to say that whereas faith in one another is an apriori requirement for dialogue, mutual trust is established by dialogue. When these conditions are absent we cannot talk of any meaningful dialogue.

It is important to note that these conditions are given expressions in different cultural settings in Africa. As a social ethic, for example, the concept of Ubuntu in the Zulu language of South Africa, Ujamaa in Kiswahili and Kpara Kpor of Yoruba of Nigeria are concepts which emphasises cooperation, mutual respect and support as well as unity within and across the community. The prevalence of this vital force is manifest in our collective goal, which is peace. It points to the committedness to the community as men and women of all ages are allowed to participate meaningfully in cooperation.

The attempt thus far has been that of how, in spite of the differences of ethnic groups and their attendant conflicts, we can effectively control or resolve our ethnic differences. In doing this, we have deliberately avoided the question of whether the ethnic crises in the African state are products of the socio-cultural configurations of the African society or that of the state's inability to fulfil its obligation to its citizens. This is because ethnic conflict is a human phenomenon and as social beings that must of necessity interact with one another, we must seek viable ways of transcending our differences and live like brothers.

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