Exploring Conflict and Its Dialectic Nature in a Ghanaian Society

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Abstract

Conflict is the disagreement or misunderstanding that exists among individuals and groups. This paper examines the dialectics of conflict from a sociological perspective. A descriptive research design was employed to study the dialectical nature of conflict in social discourse. The authors used document analysis, together with secondary data obtained through the desk review method, to discuss the results. Findings show that conflict can sometimes be hostile and violent, resulting in wars, and affecting our daily relationships with others. On the other hand, it can be deduced that the aspect of the results that reveals the dialectical aspect of conflict is the interpretation of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation, to mention a few. These are effective communication tools that can be used to restore peace and prevent subsequent relapse into conflict. It is recommended that conflict resolution centers or institutions intensify their operations to mitigate conflict situations in our communities. Effective propagation of the message of conflict resolution will be key to sensitizing young people to communicate effectively and avoid generating conflict issues among themselves.

1. Introduction

Conflict is the disagreement or misunderstanding that exists among individuals and groups (Zimmermann, McQuinn & Macdonald, 2020) [1]. These disagree-

ments come about as a result of friction in ideas, collision in decision making, and sharing of distinct perspectives on issues. For Nicholson (1992) [2], conflict is defined as an existing state of disagreement, hostility or hooliganism between two or more people. By this, it means two or more parties or individuals do not have an accord and are as such on two different positions on the same issue. Conflict's impacts go well beyond losses and immediate deaths. Armed conflict, by definition, produces a huge gap between developed and developing nations that have endured it and those that have not, since political, social, and economic institutions are irreversibly altered and harmed (Al-Makura, 2021) [3]. When the underlying causes and variables attributed to these conflicts are not comprehensively, substantively, and managed effectively during post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation processes, it results in very fragile states that easily revert to conflict, necessitating the implementation of an effective conflict resolution strategy (Bright-Brock, 2001) [4].

Although generally having a negative connotation, conflict constitutes an undeniable characteristic of human interaction. Denohue and Kott (1992, p. 4) [5] define conflict as "a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals" In the early colonial war, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, persistent sectarian clashes have resulted in significant breaches of the African people's fundamental rights and broken homes. These battles have lasted a long period, resulting in intractable human rights and human security crises and forceful displacement of people. Since 1991, violent relocation in several sections of the country, particularly in post-conflict areas, has established a troubling tendency surrounding the government. Internal displacement, in addition to causing enormous human suffering, and economic and ecological destruction, creates uncertainty around land issues and, at times, escalates violence as the displaced seek to return home through formal government settlement programs or find new homes through informal settlement schemes (Wachu, Wokabi & Hadijah, 2015 [6]; Orago, 2017 [7]).

It thus suggests that it is the pursuit of incompatible goals. Put differently, conflict means collision course; it also refers to opposition to existing views, stands, or positions. Conflict occurs in every facet of life. That is, it takes place in the economic, social, political and religious spheres of life which sometimes, leads to violence, destruction and loss of human lives. It also takes place in our homes, schools, communities and even in organizations. The basis of the daily frictions or collisions is dialogue or communication existing between individuals or among various groups (Yahaya, 2016) [8]. The twist in various formal communications and the mere fact that people do not settle on common ideas leads to what is known as conflict. It is generally believed that conflict occurs when communication or dialogue is ruined and it also ends when proper communication is reinstated (Shamir, 2016) [9]. Therefore, conflict begins with a dialogue

and ends with a dialogue. It is on the basis of these that conflict is regarded as dialogue-oriented or dialectic in nature.

The rationale of the study underscores that the dialectic nature of conflict has exposed the influence of conflict on socio-economic development as well as displacing livelihoods in many societies or communities. Extant research has been done with much emphasis on conflict and its implications on society, conflict and its implications on development thus, both local and international (Bright-Brock, 2001) [4] but little has been done on livelihoods of affected people from a sociological perspective. Therefore, to fill the dearth in the literature, the paper examines the dialectic nature of conflict to humanity. Specifically, the paper focuses on first, the dialectic nature of conflict in conflict resolution; second, to explain how this dialectic nature of conflict has deepened the conflict resolution gap; and finally, recommending ways to improve dialectic nature of conflict in conflict resolution.

The rest of this study is as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical and empirical review; Section 3 describes the methodology used; Section 4 presents the results and discussion, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review

This chapter review literature on theories, conflict and nature of conflict. How the conflict is impacting socio-economic livelihood, and displacement was also reviewed.

The goal of this field of study is to find ways to alter the dynamics of conflicts and create lasting peace for all parties involved. However, professionals in conflict resolution and negotiation, peace researchers, activists, agents, and/or concerned institutions need a deep and systematic understanding of the root or remote cause of the conflict to map-out solutions for the resolution of conflict. Understanding peace and conflict resolution procedures require an examination of the theories that underpin the subject. The realist theory ties the reasons for conflict in any community to man's innate selfishness. It reveals the flaws and individuality that are inherent in human nature. Hans Morgenthau is a notable proponent of the Realist school of thought. According to the thesis, competition between states is the inevitable manifestation of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competing interest (Deutsch, 1973) [10].

Walt (1998) [11] opined that the theory has three components namely: Descriptive Realism, which sees the world as a battlefield; Explanatory Realism, which seeks to demonstrate that there are genetic defects that drive humankind to behave negatively and that wars become unavoidable because there is no mechanism to prevent them from occurring; and Prescriptive Realism, which builds on the arguments of Descriptive and Explanatory realism too. They argue that "human nature is greedy, egotistical, and innately conflictive; those nations will always pursue their national interests defined as power, and that such interests will clash with those of others, resulting in the inevitability of conflict." This

theory supports the existence of conflicts in the international system as well as the militarization of relations between nation-states. Morgenthau and his fellow realists contend that conflict stems from forces inherent in human nature (Ebegbulem, 2019) [12].

3. The Concept of Conflict

There were several definitions of conflict gleaned from the literature regarding the dialectical nature of conflict. For instance, Holsti (1995) [13] defined conflict as "A particular relationship between states or rival factions within a state which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subjective economic or military hostilities". This shows that conflict can be viewed as violent hostilities among groups. Also, conflict is not restricted by boundary but can exist everywhere. To Coser (1998) [14], "conflict can be defined as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to injure or eliminate their rivals". Here, it is regarded as the struggle for power and resources in which people encounter their oppositions. Stated differently, Omotosho (2004) [15], opined that, "Conflicts could, however, be violent or uncontrollable, dominant or recessive, resolvable or insolvable". This presupposes that violence is not an inherent aspect of conflict but rather a potential form that conflict may take.

3.1. Types and Nature of Conflict

From the literature reviewed, it can be generally reviewed that, conflict can be grouped into internal and international forms. For example, Eminue (2004) [16] highlighted the internal type of conflict and explained that, "internal conflict (or intra-states conflict) is one in which the governmental authorities of a state are opposed by groups within that state seeking to overthrow those authorities with force of arms". He further stressed that internal conflict may also be seen as one in which armed violence occurs primarily within the borders of a single state. On the other hand, Puchala (1971) [17] explained "international conflict or interstate conflicts as the one which takes place between two or more nations and involves forces of more than one state". It is apt to observe that Africa has experienced both types of conflict over the years.

In our daily engagement, we sometimes find it difficult to even come to terms with ourselves. This unsettlement with our own selves even transcends to affect our interactions with others, our associations in a defined group and even in organizations. As a result, conflict constitutes distinct levels with respect to our daily discourse with our immediate environment. These levels include; Intrapersonal (within an individual), Interpersonal (between individuals), Intragroup (within a group), Intergroup (between groups) and Intra-organizational (within organizations) (Jen & Mannix, 2001) [18]. First, intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual, and often involves some form of goal conflict or cognitive conflict. Goal conflict exists for individuals when their behaviour will result in

outcomes that are mutually exclusive or have compatible elements (both positive and negative outcomes). There are situations in which a person has a choice between two or more alternatives with positive outcomes; for example, a person can choose between two jobs that appear to be equally attractive. Also, people sometimes find themselves in a situation in which a person must choose between two or more alternatives, and they all have negative outcomes. Lastly, is a situation in which a person must decide whether to do something that had both positive and negative outcomes, for example, being offered a good job in a bad location.

On the contrary, interpersonal conflict involves two or more individuals rather than one individual. Two managers competing for the same promotion, and two executives maneuvering for a larger share of corporate capital examples of conflict between individuals are legion and quite familiar. Some of the reasons for interpersonal conflict are; personality differences: Some people have difficulty in getting along with each other. This is purely a psychological problem and it has nothing to do with their job requirements or formal interactions. Also, the issue of perceptions, varied backgrounds, experiences, education and training result in individuals developing different perceptions of similar realities; the result is an increase in the likelihood of interpersonal conflict. Besides, there is also the issue of clashes of values and interests: Conflict that so commonly develops between engineering and manufacturing personnel shows how differences in values might underlie conflict. Members of the engineering department might place a premium on quality, sophisticated design and durability while members of the manufacturing department might value simplicity and low manufacturing costs. Added to the above is the problem of power and status differences: As pointed out by Abraham Zalenznik "organizations are political structures". They operate by distributing authority and setting a stage for the exercise of power. Similarly, status inconsistencies lead to conflict.

Further, the next level of conflict that is worth emphasizing is intergroup conflict. An organization is a collection of individuals and groups. As the situation and requirements demand, individuals from various groups (Adam, 2000) [19]. The success of the organization as a whole depends upon the harmonical relations among all interdependent groups, even though some intergroup conflicts in organizations are inevitable. The idea is to study intergroup behaviours within an organization so that any conflict can be recognized and dealt with by the management. Other conflict situations take place among staff members, managers, administrators and other individuals in large organizations. Some of the disagreements are vertical in nature, horizontal, role oriented and staff-bound.

Vertical conflict refers to any conflict between levels in an organization; superior-subordinate conflict is one example. Vertical conflicts usually arise because superiors attempt to control subordinates and subordinates. Horizontal conflict also refers to conflict between employees or departments at the same hierarchical level in an organization. Apart from these two, there is the role conflict. A role is the cluster of activities that others expect individuals to perform in their posi-

tion. A role frequently involves conflict. Managing Conflict except in very few situations where the conflict can lead to competition and creativity so that in such situations the conflict can be encouraged, in all other cases where conflict is destructive in nature, it should be resolved as soon after it has developed as possible, but all efforts should be made to prevent it from developing.

Lastly, there is also another level of conflict known as the Line-Staff Conflict: Most organizations have staff departments to assist the line departments. The line-staff relationship frequently involves conflict. Staff managers and line managers typically have different personal characteristics. Staff employees tend to have a higher level of education, come from different backgrounds, and are younger than line employees. These different personal characteristics are frequently associated with different values and beliefs, and the surfacing of these different values tends to create conflict. All these levels of conflict indicated are socially inclined because they come as a result of people's interaction with others at a given point in time where people share divergent views.

3.2. Manifestations of Conflict

It was discussed that conflict does not actually occur in a vacuum. There are mostly some indications or manifestations that drive the occurrence of conflict situations. These are also called forces behind the occurrence of conflict (Albert, 1995) [20]. The first manifestation of conflict situations includes revolt which was conceptualized as a "popular uprising against established order. In some cases, a revolt may fester and culminate in revolution, which is described as the total sweeping off or changing of a status quo through a sustained and popular movement". Secondly, another manifestation indicated was a protest which was defined as "organized (mass) demonstration against a government, an action or an unpopular policy/decision. Such protest may be either peaceful or violent, and it could be well received by the target or brashly responded to, resulting in violence". Mutiny, on the other hand, "is an act of disobedience in the military or an uprising in the security forces against its high command or against the Commander-in-Chief, usually aimed at dismantling established order and which may result in the toppling of the government. When an act of mutiny fails, the culprits usually face a Court Marshall (a military court) where sentences vary from dismissal to death of the mutineers".

The final of it is what is known as insurgency. Insurgency refers to an uprising against the state. It could be led by a religious, ethnic or sectional group. The intent is usually to destabilize the state with a view to be heard or recognized, as well as to forcefully control the affairs of the state or secede. Insurgencies have produced new states in global politics. These have included Eritrea that emerged from old Ethiopia; South Sudan that emerged from Sudan; and Slovakia that arose from old Czechoslovakia. Some insurgencies have failed to produce desired results, but have caused maximum mayhem for sovereign states, such as DRC, Mali, Kosovo, and Nigeria.

3.3. The Dialogues of Resolving Conflict

Conflict of any kind is premised on daily strained interactions among people. Because it is established when communication breaks down, conflict is likely to occur. These are some dialectic means of resolving our day-to-day conflict situations; negotiation, reconciliation, mediation and arbitration and ignoring. These are strong dialectic means of settling conflict issues in our homes, schools, communities, churches and all other places. These dialogue apparatuses are needed since conflict is boundless (Omotosho, 2004) [15].

Negotiation refers to a situation whereby two or more individuals involved in misunderstanding or disagreements present their wranglings to a negotiation table for resolution to be reached amicably. On the other hand, reconciliation is another paramount tool that is dialectically acceptable in solving conflict cases among individuals (Orago, 2017) [7]. This refers to a situation whereby one gives up every grudge or friction in order to reunite with others the previously saw as opposers or enemies in some decision-making processes. Furthermore, mediation is a situation whereby a neutral individual listens to the contrasting ideas of two or more people involved in a conflict and intends to settle their rifts through sound judgement, clarification and the reinstation of peace between the opposing groups. The individual who steers the resolution affair is known as a mediator. Moreover, through the process of arbitration, people are able to resolve their conflicting situations easily. Unlike mediation, this one involves the act of submitting one's grudge or disagreement to a neutral person out there who is legally regarded as an arbitrator. The arbitrator also tries to restore peace and settle differences through judgements that are sound and appealing to both parties in conflict.

4. Methodology

A study design for any study is determined by the research problem description and the specified objectives for the study. The study employed a desk review approach was used base on the narrative literature review of available studies publicly on dialectic nature of conflict and conflict resolution. The choice of this design stems from its enormous benefits and suitability in the context, nature, and purpose of the study. The pragmatic philosophy of situating eclectic meanings to realities was preferred for the study. This is because it provides constructive meaning to the ideas and numeric information that come from different perspectives in a study. It allowed for the understanding of the complexities associated with the research problem since most of the research is skewed to the quantitative side with little on the qualitative. Therefore, the pragmatic philosophy reinforces the gaps in both quantitative and qualitative research, thus, putting the practice of observable facts and experiences into action. Secondary data was mostly gathered through the examination of numerous papers pertinent to the study. This required scouring the internet for pertinent resources, reviewing records and documents, and generally going through literature for re-

levant things to serve as the background for the discussions. A document analysis was used to analyse the objectives of this study. Document analysis gives the researcher the voice and meaning of the assessment of a research problem (Cardno, 2018) [21]. Document analysis was employed because it is time-efficient and cost-effective as well as points to questions that need to be observed for easy critical evaluation and comprehensibility (Cardno, 2018) [21].

5. Discussions

5.1. Dialectic Nature of Conflict

From the literature gathered and examined, it can be deduced that, conflict comes in distinct forms. Conflict can also be seen to be sometimes hostile, violent, culminate in wars and affect our daily relationship with others. It further is inferred that, without any ruin in communication or dialogue, there will be no conflict. This implied that, the baseline of conflict situations in our societies is communication. Poor communication can lead to conflict but good communication can rescue us from unusual conflicting situation. It can be understood that, at the very fundamental stage, conflict begins with an individual. That is to say, conflict can be psychological in nature where individuals are faced with contrasting issues and cannot settle with a single one. This gradually transcends into not settling with others on issues in life. It can also be deduced that, the aspect of the results that reveal the dialectic aspect of conflict is the interpretations of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, ignoring, and reconciliation among others. These are effective communicable tools that one can use to restore peace and prevent the subsequent relapse into conflict. These conflict resolution processes are very relevant and require expert skills in achieving their end goals in terms of resolving conflict. Conflict in its entirety, is inseparable from effective discourse among people. Whiles it is evidence that, communication generates conflict, it is in the same way effective communication will at the same time help in resolving conflict.

Conflict leads to deviation from primary purposes in the sense that individuals and groups are left with less time and resources for other activities. When a conflict involves the use of "heavy contentious tactics," it can cause the individuals or groups involved in the conflict as well as individuals or groups not involved in the conflict to divert time and resources away from other needs. Building on this, people who are in or affected by a conflict can experience both short-term and long-term effects on their physical and mental health. In the worst case, the psychological effects can include deep trauma and fewer ways to deal with stress.

Linked to the above interpretation, many people find themselves in conflict situations because they are unable to communicate their thoughts well for proper comprehension. To some extent, people are being influenced by their innate biases just to forfeit constructive decisions by others which ends up in conflict cases. As communication is the brain behind settling conflict among us, there is

a need for the training conflict expert who can use these dialectic tools for resolving conflict to help remedy conflict cases in our society. Conflict resolution centres or institutions must also intensify their operations in militating against conflict situations in our communities. Effective propagation of the message of conflict resolution will be the key to sensitizing young people to communicate effectively so as to avoid generating conflict issues among themselves. Since the tactics for resolving the conflict have been established, the group no longer needs to divert emotions or financial resources into the conflict, which may instead be employed for useful purposes. New solutions are found, innovation increases, and productivity rises as a result of its resolution.

5.2. Implication of Dialectical Conflict on Conflict Resolution

Dialectical conflict leads to internal change. Different approaches to a specific problem that the disputing parties share frequently lead to conflicts. The true issue can be discovered and resolved if discourse is done and the parties start to investigate the motives underlying their opposing perspectives. As disputing parties experience conflict and engage in dialogue with others of differing needs and beliefs, they are confronted with the prospect of making adjustments in their positions. The pressure to explore new ideas and feelings can challenge conflict communities or societies to move from rigidity to flexibility, with consequent internal change. Another issue is that dialectical conflict brings about sense of identity and solidarity: As regions or communities engage in conflict, their sense of who they are as persons, with unique needs tends to be sharpened. They learn more about their shared and unique characteristics as they each develop their own unique identities. The shared experiences strengthen bonds of friendship and community, while individual distinctions enrich a sense of self. Conflict, by forcing disputants to work through their differences and come together as a unit, can also strengthen a feeling of shared identity and purpose within a group. Groups cannot grow or innovate without some level of disagreement.

Conflict also tends to make people talk to each other more and creates a new system that everyone is a part of right away. When one party changes, all the other parties must also change in order to get back to a state of balance. There is an increased trust when people first meet each other in a group setting, they don't trust each other very much. This makes group members act defensively. This inclination is accentuated in conflict situations since both sides fear they will come out worse. As people get more comfortable opening up to one another, trust grows inside the group, allowing members to stop spending so much time and effort guarding themselves. The group can be healed of some of the negative feelings that tend to prevail in conflict situations as the disagreement is exposed and the parties involved express their views and feelings.

6. Conclusions

It can be concluded that conflict is dialectical in nature because it is social archi-

tecture. This is because it is created out of opposing arguments, contrasting ideas, unsettling decisions, misunderstandings or disagreements, and many more. These are social tools or linguistic avenues through which conflict occurs in our societies. In the same vein, effective communication among individuals where interaction is devoid of ambiguity, vague and non-precise intonations, is the only avenue through which conflict situations can be resolved.

It can be concluded that conflict is also interactive, psychological and interpersonal in nature. Conflict does not happen in a vacuum but it is created through our daily interactions with others. Our interactivities may sometimes be foul, provoking and prepare the grounds for others to either accept or oppose our ideas and thoughts regarding situations.

It can also be concluded at every stage in life, people intend to share divergent views on issues or problems considered in life. These opposing ideas are expressed through oral discourses and sometimes in the form of written communication. The interdependence between communication and the generation of conflict situations keeps recurring in our daily lives. In this essence, one can say conflict is actually dialectical in nature because it can be analysed through the rigours of communication, and expression of distinct reasoning among individuals and groups of people in our society. At one point, people endorse other people's ideas and at another point, they share different views.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

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