NAME: DANIELS DARAAYO OLUROTIMI

COURSE: PEACE AND CONFLICT

DEPARTMENT: COLLEGE OF LAW

QUESTION: WRITE AN ESSAY ON VIOLENT CONFLICT IN YOUR GEOPOLITICAL ZONE.

Conflict, from an etymological point of view, has a root in the Latin word, ‘conflictus’ which is the past participle of the verb ‘confligere’. ‘Confligere’ means ‘to strike together’ or to be ‘in contest’. Conflict can also be described as relational disputes between two or more parties. Conflict, as defined by Diller (1997), is any form of confrontation between two or more parties resulting from ‘a situation where these two or more interdependent groups or systems of action have incompatible goals. Violence is a product of unresolved conflict. However, conflict is unavoidable in human existence.

In the South-Western part of Nigeria which is where I’m from, many conflicts have risen out of disagreements between people, towns and cities. One of the many conflicts is that of land conflicts. Examples of such conflicts include that of Ife-Modakeke in Osun State, the Jukun-Chamba conflict in the Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State, the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Benue and Plateau States, and the Umuleri-Aguleri war of attrition over Otuocha land in Anambra State. Land conflicts in this part of Nigeria have been occuring over a long period of time panning since the 1980’s. The first Ife-Modakeke conflict took place between 1835 and 1849 and stemmed from the disintegration of the old Oyo Empire - a development that resulted in the massive displacement of people throughout the region. These land conflicts were also found between majority and minority populations of the same ethnic group such as between the Aguleri and Umuleri over Otuocha—or of two different ethnic groups, such as Jukun-Tiv conflict in central Nigeria.

I will be focusing mostly on the Ife-Modakeke conflict in the Ife kingdom in Osun State. The Ife Kingdom is reserved as the traditional home of the Yoruba and protected from internal and international aggressions through oral peace agreement among the various warrior groups in the region. Modakeke became refugees in Ile-Ife following the Fulani Jihad war that led to the collapse of the old Oyo Kingdom in 1836 (Manning, 1979). The Ife/Modakeke crisis, which started in the nineteenth century, was a product of identity recognition, acceptability, inheritance protection and property rights (Oladoyin, 2001). The Modakeke inhabitants did not want to be seen as part and parcel of Ife-Ife. They rejected the supremacy of Ooni, the traditional ruler of the Ife Kingdom and wanted “Isakole” payment over land to the Ife to be stopped (Oladoyin, 2001). External factors including political elites and rivalry between the Oyo and Ife Kingdoms have made the conflict intractable (Laitin, 1986). The conflict has been described as the longest intra-ethnic conflict in the history of the Yorubas in the south-west of Nigeria. The first intra-community conflict between the Modakekes and the Ifes broke out in 1835 (Oladoyin, 2001). To negotiate peace, a ceasefire was brokered in 1886 through the efforts of Samuel Johnson, a historian, and Charles Phillips, the Bishop of Ondo (Toriola, 2001). The parties signed a treaty in Lagos, the former Federal Capital of Nigeria with Governor Maloney. The treaty provided for the evacuation of the Modakekes from the Ife Kingdom (Toriola, 2001). The Modakekes later returned to the Ife Kingdom on the condition of peaceful living and respect for the authority of Ooni, the paramount ruler of the Ife Kingdom. The 1940 judicial pronouncement made it mandatory for the Modakekes who wish to continue to live on Ife land to pay tribute (Asiyanbola, 2007). The inhabitants of Modakeke were not satisfied with the resolution of the conflict, however (Ogbara, 2002) and the conflict resurfaced in a vicious cycle in the 1960s until the 1990s (Albert, 1999). In the 1980, the inhabitants of Modakeke demanded recognition from the Ooni for their self appointed traditional ruler, the Ogunsua of Modakeke and creation of a separate Local Government Area (LGA) and a stop to the payment of “Isakole” royalty to the Ife land owners (Laitin, 1986). The major contention of the 1990s conflict was the creation of LGA. Issues on chieftaincy and payment of royalty had earlier been settled by successive governments in the region. The Ogunsua of Modakeke was upgraded to third class Oba and the Inhabitants of Modakeke stopped from paying royalty on land. Various commissions and panel of enquiries were established to resolve the conflict, namely: Honourable Kayode Ibidapo Obe’s Judicial Commission, Chief Alex Akinyele Committee of Enquiry and Commodore Olabode George’s Committee that led to the final peaceful resolution of the conflict in 2000. The committee makes the following resolutions:

• Change in the Modakeke status. A prefix “Ife” should be added to the name “Modakeke” to become ‘Modakeke-Ife.

• Ife East LGA office should be created for Modakeke in Oke DO.

• A Mobile Police Training Institution should be created in Ile-Ife.

• Police buffer zones should be created in conflict flash points (see Commodore Olabode Gorge Ife-Modakeke Committee Panel Reports, 2000).

Other forms of resolution by previous committees included resettlement, relocation and peace education. For example, Judith Asuni organised a peace education programme for youths in both Ife and Modakeke in 2000. Also, Professor Olawale Albert provided third party initiatives through media campaign activities, separate community training, joint training on forgiveness, reconciliation and transformative leadership in the two communities, and finally, the Ife/Modakeke inter-community peace advocacy committee (Albert, 2001). Today, there is no open conflict between Ife and Modakeke but its trauma lingers on (Olayiwola & Okorie, 2010).

The act of storytelling over time, has helped the people of Modakeke to heal. However, it can also be used in the negative if both sides continue to differ over the points of view.

Lastly, it is important to know that these inter ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have been compounded by two recent developments that have adversely affected land-based disagreement throughout the country—namely the Land Use Act and the structural adjustment program. The Land Use Act, promulgated by Nigeria’s military government in 1978, provided the legal basis for taking ownership of small portions of land across the country and allowed the massive commercialization of land and entrenchment of private property rights— as the government privileged private and state capital—to the detriment of communal and lineage land rights in rural areas. The structural adjustment program (SAP) not only accentuated conflicts, but also intensified land accumulation.

It is very clear that conflict can arise from the littlest things. It is therefore important that when conflict arises, due steps are taken to bring an end to such disagreements and create a compromise that can be accepted by both parties.

References

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