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|  <p>ijar ISSN NO. 2320-5407</p> | <p>Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com</p> <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)</p> <p>Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/8036 DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/8036</p> |  <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407 Journal Homepage: http://www.journalijar.com Journal DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01</p> |
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ECONOMIC THEORY OF CONFLICT.

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 06 September 2018
Final Accepted: 08 October 2018
Published: November 2018

Keywords:

Conflict, development, economic theory, natural resources.

Abstract

Conflict is ubiquitous and permanently recurring phenomenon of human. Most of these conflicts are economically induced, and have impeded science, technology and security of nation states. There are different explanations/approaches to understanding conflicts around the world. The reality is that these are explainable using scientific and non-scientific indices. This article x-rays the economic theory of conflict to explain the *raison d'être*, triggers, catalysts, precipitators, scopes and enlightenments of why these conflicts occur. To mitigate the effects we recommend economic justice, formation of strong security outfits, mass patriotism education, protection of fundamental human rights and continuous infrastructural development of the societies that are prone to conflicts arising from economic indices.

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Introduction:-

For development to prompt science and technology for surreal progress, growth and comprehensive changes that increase the qualitative lot of the masses of the people, it must include an explanation. Explanation in this case, is tantamount to theories. Hence, in this study theory is defined as the tested explanations scholars and non-scholars alike give to phenomenon. This wrap up the fact that, theory is not an exclusive preserve of scholars in academia; the ordinary folks, do also have explanations, that are usually tested. In essence therefore, theories are tested daily in most communities globally, because events/phenomenon akin to their environments attracts interrogations, observations and testing in both qualitative and quantitative manners. Tested elucidation of events or phenomenon is as old as when man became a hunter-gatherer for survival. Theories do not necessarily need to be scientific as it could be non-scientific as well according to whether or not scientific rules are followed (Johari, 2012). In African cosmos, theories are expressed in proverbs, idioms and folktales (Ukoma, Egwu and Ogechukwu, 2016; Avoseh, 2013). This shows that a theory of phenomenon is not a western mainstay. It is a common heritage, a sort of commonwealth knowledge for humanity, because as it has been clarified, it is a Homo sapien heritage. Indeed to according Dei (2004) "all humans are theory builders".

Conflict is ubiquitous, natural and permanently recurring phenomenon of human. It forms a crucial and unavoidable part of human life (Roger, 2006:56). According to Dougherty, Pfaltzgraff and Robert (1981) conflict refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-economic, political or others) is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more identifiable human group because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals. Similarly, Coser (1956) says conflict is a "struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, resources in which the aims of the opponents are to

neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals". Conflict is not the exclusive reserve of only developing countries such as Nigeria. The materially developed nations have also suffered and are still suffering from various kinds of conflicts. It appears that currently, large scale destructive violence is becoming a prominent characteristic of the materially underdeveloped countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Millions of innocent people have died in conflicts in Africa and other countries that are preventable or could have been resolved to a large extent early if the knowledge of peace and conflict studies is made available to many of the major stakeholders. Several reasons have been given to explain conflict.

The roots of modern theories of conflict can be traced to Max Weber, Karl Max, Sigmund Freud, Niccolo Machiavelli, Carl von Clausewitz and Adam Smith; these writers postulated in a western-oriented traditions; analyzed conflict vis-à-vis the prisms of economic ramifications. However, currently, there are different theoretical approaches to understanding conflicts ravaging the whole of the world (United States Institute of Peace, 2007 and Anirban & Debraj, 2014). The psychologists focused on intrapersonal conflicts, while social psychologists concentrated on and are still focusing on inter-personal and inter-group conflicts. Economists have focused on economic competitions, labour negotiation and trade disputes. Political scientists have specialized in political and international issues while mathematicians and statisticians usually aligned with game theory (Chris, 1999; and Abdul, 2014). The economic theory of conflict however, is interested in the economic *raison d'être*, triggers, catalyst, precipitators, scopes and enlightenments of why conflicts occur.

Civil wars and other destructive violent conflicts continue to be a major feature of contemporary developing countries, mostly in Sub-Sahara Africa and Asia, and as sources of underdevelopment (Keih and Agbese, 2008; Nnoli, 2006; Williams, 2005; Adekanye, 2007). Although much contemporary conflicts seem to be about political, ethnic, or religious differences, in fact these conflicts generally have economic and political bases (Graham, and Frances, 2015). This makes the economic explanations of war and other unsightly phenomenon very imperative in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular.

Theories of Conflict to Explain Crises in Nigeria

Paul Collier, an expert on the economics of civil war, has estimated that close to fifty armed conflicts that were active 2001 had a strong link to natural resource exploitation, in which either licit or illicit exploitation helped to trigger, intensify, or sustain violence. According to Collier (2003) in Pakistan and Bolivia, for example, violent protests had broken out over the distribution of water. In the Middle East, disputes over oil fields in Kuwait, among other issues, led to the first Gulf War. In another example, the rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (known by its Portuguese acronym UNITA) used revenues derived from diamond mining to fund their rebellions against their respective governments (Ross, 2004; Collier, 2000; Rono, 1993). Research has indicated that wars appear to be lasting longer: the expected duration of conflict is now more than double that of conflicts that started prior to 1980 because of economic exegeses (United States Institute of Peace, 2007).

Conflicts in Nigeria like most violent conflict-torn nations have attracted a lot of dissections from the initiated and the non-initiated (Achebe, 2012; Toyo, 2011; Nnoli, 2008; Best, 2007; Anifowose, 1982). Daily and in an unprecedented manner, new well-tested explanations are being shunned out to explain the common-place conflicts in the nation. Table 1.1 contains some of the major theories that have been used to explain all the forms of conflicts that have been bedeviling Nigeria. It is pertinent to add that, some of the theories are relatively new in terms of concrete naming.

Table 1.1:-Major theories of conflict that have been used to explain Conflicts in Nigeria

| S/N | Names of theories | Major Founders/ Advocates/ Sources | Core Summation |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Economic theory of conflict | Karl Marx, Claude Ake/ Economist/ Africanists/ Socialists/ Communists and more recently, Collier P. and Anke H. (2002) | Conflicts occurs because elites, etc make gains out of conflicts to make profit. Poverty is the cause of conflicts. |
| 2 | Realist theory of conflict | International Relations scholars | The dominance factor in all human beings and in all international relationships is the major causes of conflicts |

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| 3 | Structural conflict theory | Mathematicians/ sociologists | Difference and diverse antagonistic classes and groups in the country are the major causes of conflicts |
| 4 | Biological theory of conflict | Biological and hereditary scientists | Conflicts happen in our societies because human beings are evil by nature |
| 5 | Frustration-aggression conflict theory | Psychologists/ Sigmund Freud | Conflicts crop up in our communities because of frustration as a result of non-fulfillment or denial of the legitimate needs (such as employment, freedom of worship, lack of franchise, etc.) of the individuals in the communities. |
| 6 | Psycho-cultural theory conflict | Psychologists and Culturalists | Conflicts occur because some groups in our societies suffer from some forms of discrimination or deprivation of their psychological needs (such as self-actualization like promotion at their places of work) because of their identities (culture) |
| 7 | Human needs theory | Midlarsky, M. (1975:29) | Conflict occurs because most members of the communities cannot work to provide the basic needs for themselves because of the activities of other members of the community |
| 8 | Systematic theory of conflict | System activities and scholars | Violent social conflicts emerge because of the effects of large scale (usually unplanned) political, economic, social and cultural systematic changes. |
| 9 | Nuisance-value theory of conflict | Alfred Charles | Conflict occurs because some followers of most leaders just want to be trouble makers to assert their relevance |
| 10 | Eye-service theory of conflict | Alfred Charles | Conflicts emerge because followers of mostly political leaders believe they are working |
| 11 | Illiteracy-oriented theory | Alfred Charles | Misinformation that drives as a result of inability to read, write, compute and deeply reason in any language |
| 12 | Conspiracy theory of conflict | Simeon H. O. Alozieuwa | Hidden agenda to dominate each other in the communities |
| 13 | Western/Jewish/Christianity theory | Some Islamic scholars/Christian scholars | Quest to make Jewish/ Christian values supreme |
| 14 | The Islamic theocratic state theory | Mozayyan (2009:244)/ some major Islamic thinkers | The quest to establish the Islamic government or societies |
| 15 | Political feud perspective | Kukah (1993) | Differences in political goals/orientations/believers |
| 16 | Vengeance theory | Simeon H.O. Alozieuwa | The quest to pay- back. Take a revenge made conflicts possible. lack of forgiveness for ancient wrongs |
| 17 | Gender theory of conflict | Gender activists and feminists | Differences/ advantages ascribed to male and female as a result of cultural orientations. or socializations |

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| 18 | Superiority complex theory conflict | Alfred Charles | Quest to prove superior power/ who controls the communities/ organization |
| 19 | Greedy-rebellion theory | Collier & Hoeffler (2004) | Greedy-rebellion theory makes an emphasis on extortion which occurs because of primary commodity export. the good profit to be made from extortion can trigger and maintain violent conflicts |
| 20 | Universal grievance theory | Ali, 2009 and Collier & Hoeffler, 2004 | Societies consist of various segments so it is possible that some of them may have grievances and such grievances can lead to occurrence of violence in quest of resolving them. There are three types of grievances that propel violent conflicts: hatred between groups; political exclusion and mere vengeance |
| 21 | Relative deprivation theory | Box-Steffensmeir, et al., 2005 and Schock, 1996 | The emphasis is on economic inequality, if people are convinced that there is a gap between what they perceive they deserve and what they actually get, they will likely develop discontent and this can lead them rebellion. The origin of the relative deprivation theory stresses the degree of the economic inequality in a society. |
| 22 | Marxist theory of rebellion | Marx, 1852, Marx 1850 and Schock, 1996 | The market crises leads to revolt within the peasantry and other classes who experience secondary exploitation, thereby all the exploited unite to oppose the system. In the capitalists state, structural inequalities lead to economic exploitation of the workers and this leads to a class struggle between workers and owners of capital. The Marxist theory of rebellion focuses on class struggle. |
| 23 | Theory of ethnic defection | Kaufman, 1996; Kalyvas, 2005; Sabanis, 2001; Horowitz, 1985, and Okwudibia Nnoli (2007; 1980). | It is based on reaction to economic and political discrimination which affect certain sections/ethnic groups in a society. The ethnic groups in a conflict hold onto their identities and do not accept other identities. ethnic mobilization conflict theory focuses on ethnic disaffection caused by discriminations |
| 24 | The 'Rising poverty equals rising conflict' | Adekanye, J. 'Bayo (1994) | The major argument is a poverty/conflict linkage. The rise in poverty if it coincides with a period of drastic economic decline, reduction in standard of living for majority of social groups or classes or individual, and acute competition for fast diminishing public resources may result in serious conflict. |

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| 24 | Youth bulge theory of conflicts | The term was coined by German social scientist Gunnar Heinsohn in the mid-1990s but has gained greater currency in recent years, thanks to the work of American Political Scientists Gary Fuller and Jack A. Goldstone (foreign council relations, 2007) Patrick, K (March 19 th , 2014) | Lack of good governance forced youths who are already in excess in terms of population to violent conflicts. |
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Source: Authors (2018)

Economic Theory of Conflict: An over-view

There are variances of economic theory of conflict. These are greedy-rebellion theory; universal grievance theory; relative deprivation; the Marxist theory of rebellion; ethnic mobilization and conflict theory; and the theory of ethnic defection (Macleans, 2012). There is also the rentier state; rising poverty equals rising conflict (Adekanye, 1994). All these formulations which are connected to the economy of a conflict zone and her people's economic well-being or otherwise are sometimes presented in the literature as having same focus and postulations (Macleans 2012).

This study is predicated on and the only interested in the economic theory of conflict developed and made famous, in recent times by the American World Bank economist, Paul Collier, and his associates in their highly regarded works: Collier and Anke (2004); Collier and Anke (2002) ; and Collier (2003). The major postulation of the variance of this theory is that, conflicts are caused by elite competition over valuable natural resources' rents and the competition that causes conflict is always conceal as collective grievance. Additionally, this theory also further encapsulate that, civil wars or other forms of conflicts supported by natural resources based rents or proceeds like diamond or crude oil or gold are more likely to last very long because peace processes are always jettisoned by the war entrepreneurs that are "making it big" in real conflict situations (Osah, Ogundiwin and Eti, 2017; Mansoob and Muhammed, 2007:3). Therefore, even when motivated by legitimate grievances or the quest for political power, the rise and continuation of a conflict is only possible if the warring parties are financially equipped to do so (Anirban and Debraj, 2014; Naidoo 2000:2).

Collier, et al (2007) also interprets the economic theory of conflict as focusing on the feasibility of rebellion that germinates in positive economic environments. The original objectives of the rebels are not the ones which push them to start war. At the same time if there is a space in the conflict there can be other rebels too. According to Collier et al. (2007):

What causes civil wars or other forms of violent conflicts is the presence and durability of a rebel army financial and military capabilities. The most important thing is that the rebel army can be able to run its operations both financially and militarily. The major emphasis in this theory is the feasibility of the rebellion. The variables which are proxy of feasibility are mountainous terrain, protection through external agreement, low per capita income, declining and stagnant economic growth and presence of large primary resource in a country (Collier et al., 2007:33).

The Collier et al, brand of the economic theory of conflict became a sort of a *guardian angel* in international donors and intervention agencies' circles, just recently, to the level that every step taken by these agencies must be after a consultation with the principals of the theory. The Western media such as Financial Times, International Herald Tribune, Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC), and the Time Magazine, gave this theory immense publicity because of the respect it gained in the corridors of power in the global North (Mansoob and Muhammed, 2007:4).

According to Ikelegbe (2005:4) there are several explanatory dimensions and implications of the 'economics of war' or 'greed and grievance' theory of explaining conflict globally in general and Africa in particular. These include:

1. That a national wealth in form of natural resources is the actual cause or rebellion and wars. Warlords and patrons of crime merely disguise their pure economic agenda, with political grievances in order to legitimize their activities. The greed for and opportunities for resource benefits is the motivation for violence and conflict by both state actors and non-state actors, such rebels, insurgents, dissidents, militias and warlord. Therefore, rebellion are war are prolonged and sustained by the war economies' opportunities and trade networks. These explain why the greedy exploitation of natural resources played a prominent role in the protracted conflicts of Liberia and Serri Leone by the ways it helped to sustain the warring groups.

2. That the economy of war is what is really under-pinning the violence in conflicts in Africa's resource rich regions. Usually violence is dissipated very highly when numerous number of actors struggle for economies space to further extract resource benefits. This also fuel the creation of militias and gangs as structures of violence and as a protection for informal networks local resources routes and markets by cliques, barons and warlord.
3. That resource interests tend to underline the interventions of neighboring states and others in resources-induced conflicts, basically these interfering states are to exploit and profit from the confusion that the war time economy had thrown up. Some of these external actors, including some multinationals, nations and non-state actors such as criminal gangs are sometimes invited by either side of the warring factions. Others also just walk in to take advantages of desperate conditions created by the war.

The economic conflict theory has been criticized for its tendency for reducing all causes of conflict to economic reasons and other related variables. The theory has also been critiqued because, the theory postulated too that most of the solutions to conflicts are located in the central governments' ability to protect economic resources and the provision of economic wellbeing to citizenry. These postulations are not totally true, according to most of the critiques (Ikelegbe (2005:6).

Economic Conflicts And Development Issues In Nigeria

Violent conflict is undoubtedly a major cause of underdevelopment (Dougherty, Pfaltzgraff and Robert, 1981). Both country studies and cross-country regressions have demonstrated the heavy economic costs of civil wars and other forms of violent conflict such as kidnapping, armed robbery and piracy in the high sea (Graham, and Frances, 2015). The consequences of violent conflicts, especially civil wars, have been explained thus:

Indeed, twenty-two out of the thirty-one countries with the lowest human development have experienced civil war since 1990. It is also widely accepted that underdevelopment is a major cause of conflict, thus giving rise to a vicious cycle in which poverty begets conflict and conflicts beget poverty, summarized as "the conflict trap" by Paul Collier and others. Yet the assumption of a straightforward causal relationship between poverty is over simple, as indicated by the middle-and -high-income area that suffer conflict-such as Middle Eastern countries, Northern Ireland, the Balkan countries, and the Basque region of Spain-and very poor areas that avoid conflict, such as Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia (Graham, and Frances, 2015:26)

The underdevelopment wars and other conflicts that have economic explanations have caused the African nation is enormous. Major armed conflict is regarded as one in which at least 5,000 people died, this means then at a rough estimate, there have been some 27 major armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan African during the past two decades. About 17 of these countries have had earlier major conflicts this century too and some eight of the conflicts, obviously have roots going back before independence. Another nine or so countries have experienced conflicts in the past twenty years or so that have had fewer casualties (Graham, and Frances, 2015).

Conflicts have been especially frequent perhaps during the 1990s in the nations that become democratic such as Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and Egypt. By another measure, an armed conflict is defined as a war when more than 1,000 people die per year, this means between 1989 and 1997 there were fourteen wars in Sub-Sahara Africa (Chris, 1999). The experience of the most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria is a grime one in terms of violent destructions of lives and property, which can be safely classified as war. The Nigerian state, currently, has become synonymous with violence of all types. No modern forms of violent, that have economic undertones, are strange to most Nigerians. Kidnappings, jungle justice oriented killings, both shallow waters and sea piracies, destruction of economic (crude oil) facilities, armed robbery, suicide bombings, political differences induce assassinations, etc consumed hundreds of lives in the country (Peel, 2010).

Hence, the violent natures of the Nigerian state and her citizens have limited its development in all fronts. It is a fact, that peace and security are the major ingredients that developments of all types need to grow to fruitful beneficiaries. This means that, until violent induced by economic reasons that the economic theory of conflict has helped to pinpoint are reduced in the country, development will continued to elude the nation in all ramifications.

Closing annotations

Types of conflicts in Nigeria that can be explained with the postulations of the economic theory of conflicts are:

1. Kidnappings
2. Separatists agitations
3. Religious conflagrations such as Boko Haram
4. Niger delta militancy
5. Sea piracy
6. Massive corruption
7. Armed robberies, especially cross borders smuggling operations
8. Assassinations; and
9. illegal bunkering of crude oil

Hence, this theory is a veritable source of analysis. This means we need to do following to stop or reduce to bearable minimum conflicts that are economically-oriented as postulated by the theory in focus, economic theory. Actions to be taken are:

Economic justice: this entails making sure that the Nigerian state takes care of all those whom capitalism has helped to push to the margins. The margins of poverty and lack of other basic needs of life. Welfarism is a part of economic justice in a rental pseudo-capitalistic state like Nigeria and other countries in Asia.

Formation of strong security outfit

To overcome economic saboteurs that usually exploit the economic wellbeing of the nation and the support their conflictual and criminal activities usually attracts, the Nigerian state must begin to build a strong security outfits, ensure a security sector reform as the present security outfits are too poorly well-funded, trained and motivated to combat actors of conflicts that are caused by economic reasons.

Mass patriotism education

One of the reasons why conflicts have become protracted in Africa, especially in nations like Nigeria, that is try to sustain democratic governance is the lack of patriotism. This explains why, the nation need to begin to spread a type of education that will make the average citizen patriotic

Protection of fundamental human rights

When the basic rights of citizenry in any nation are not well protected, actors of conflicts find it extremely difficult to operate. This is because; the governance system in the nation and the citizenry will be very alert to violations. And in most cases, violations of basic rights triggers peaceful demonstrations, etc. hence, Nigeria must begin to pay more attention to the protection of the basic human rights.

Continuous infrastructural development of the country

A nation that is developed in terms of infrastructural facilities, it is difficult for conflict actors and entrepreneurs to operate freely. As indicated by the details of the economic theory, actors of conflict that are economically-motivated needs poorly developed environments to function unreservedly. This means that, Nigeria needs to develop her infrastructure to prevent more conflict from erupting continuously.

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