

## *Chapter Three*

### **Types and Causes of Conflict**

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## **Introduction**

Conflict is as old as mankind. It is a salient feature of the human society. Men must fight even if they do not possess arms or when tools of violence are not within reach; and as Morgenthau (1948) posits, when there are no arms to fight, men will fight even with their bare fists. From birth, a baby begins the journey of conflict by crying, which is a flash of conflict. As he grows up, he bites with his teeth or scratches with the nails on his tiny fingers when he is upset. This presupposes that men will continue to fight as long as they have emotions that have the potential to love or hate; to be happy or sad; to be pleased or angry. So long as man has other men around him, there will be issues of disagreement, because interest differs and interests do clash, which may lead to disagreement or confrontation. A community or society of men thus creates room for explosive attitudes and relations.

Viewed from an extreme and religious perspective, conflict represents one of the two natures of man: 'evil'. Cooperation, its opposite, embodies the second, which is the 'good' nature of man (St. Augustine, 1950). Conflict thus manifests in disagreement, anger, quarrel, hatred, destruction, killing, or war. Any untoward attitude capable of charging up the political or social environment is likely to culminate in conflict. Greed, covetousness, self-centeredness, discontent, envy, arrogance, rudeness, impunity, among other acts, are capable of producing a breakdown of human relations. In a way, these vices are innate attributes of the 'conflict nature' of man.

The foregoing does not suggest that there are no specific causes of conflict. Conflict arises for different reasons and there are different types of conflict in human society. This chapter delves into the critical question of types and causes of conflict, with the view to addressing the common patterns of most conflicts in human society.

### **What is Conflict?**

The previous chapters have addressed the concept of conflict. We will only be doing a recap to refresh our memory as well as to capture the essence of our discourse and give us a framework for the analysis in this chapter. Conflict is an existing state of disagreement or hostility between two or more people (Nicholson, 1992). By this, it means two or more parties do not have an accord and are as such on two different parallels on the same issue. It thus suggests the pursuit of incompatible goals. Put differently, conflict means collision course; it also refers to opposition to existing view, stand, or position.

In politics, conflict is more explicitly defined. Conflict is said to exist when two or more groups engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals (Jeong, 2000). Conflict is a demonstration of cross-purposes of distinct or similar political groups which often ends in

political violence, and political violence, when contextualized in the Weberian sense, according to Anifowose, in his *Violence and Politics in Nigeria* (1982), is an acceptable weapon to ventilate anger.

Goal incompatibility implies opposing or diametrically opposed motives or pursuits. For instance, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were pursuing incompatible goals (capitalist democracy and socialism respectively) between 1945 and 1990, an era historically referred to as the Cold War. The 'war' implies the conflict of ideologies and irreconcilability of foreign policies. The period between 1967 and 1970 witnessed the total breakdown of relations and concord in Nigeria, as the East seceded from the federation because of irreconcilable differences with the rest of Nigeria. This led to the Civil War, which further aggravated the conflict because the East pursued the cause of sovereignty and nationhood, which ran contrary to the cause of 'unity' that the Nigerian government pursued.

Conflict also connotes different perceptions, which may not necessarily result in hostility. This way, conflict simply means 'a different perception' or view to an issue or situation (Barash and Webel, 2002). Here, it may mean a different interpretation of a motive, or a different world-view. These include religion, customs, cosmologies or values. Such differences may never culminate in direct and sharp confrontations. On the other hand however, different perceptions, values or world-views may transcend just 'differences' and result in the extreme connotation of conflict. Inter-faith violence is a critical example of such breakdown. Sometime ago in Nigeria, a splinter group of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in the Southwest emerged as a result of growing differences in perceptions, motives interests and values. But soon after, the split and differences led to direct clashes and breakdown of law and order.

Conflict may also connote hostility or physical confrontation (Jeong, 2000). When goal incompatibility or perception/value differences reach a crescendo, a manifestation of actual hostility or clashes is possible.

In general literature, conflict is interchangeably used with other terms. This is where it becomes pertinent to mention words or terms that represent synonyms of conflict. These include contrast, disharmony, discord, struggle, contest, strife, antagonism, controversy, clash, rivalry, contention, brawl, fistcuff, fight, battle, feud, combat and war. In politics, it is not too dissimilar; however, conflict technically means an existing state of disconnect between two or more parties on a prevailing issue.

It is however important to know that conflict does not always denote war. While all wars are a state of conflict, all conflict situations may not be a war situation. Why is this so? War is a state of mutually declared aggression between two or more parties prosecuted by conventional (uniformed and armed) soldiers, with the knowledge and observation of a third (neutral) party

who sees to it that acts are within the rules of engagement (Waltz, 2007). Anything less or short of this cannot be the same thing as war. The conflict in Mali is a state of war. The crisis in Democratic Republic of Congo is however, not ‘war’ but ‘conflict’. The M23 in DRC is not a conventional army, and it does not have such legal personality to declare war. It is a rebel group that illegally seeks to topple a legitimate government. There have however been some rare exceptions where a war is waged by one or more states against an unconventional army. The war on terror is an example in which a war situation is created as a multinational force legitimated by the United Nations wages a war on Al-Qaeda. What makes this a “war” is that it is not only collectively executed with the mandate of the UN, but the hitherto faceless Al-Qaeda had declared war on the west and their allies.

The Somali crisis can be referred to as ‘conflict’ and not ‘war’, because the Al-Shabab is an illegitimate Islamist group that seeks most unconventional means to destabilize the state and impose extreme Al-Qaeda Sharia system on a constitutionally secular entity. In both cases, the governments have not declared war, but have only clamped down on such criminal insurgent groups within the state. Conflict is thus related to but technically different from war. Conflict is a general description of a state of chaos, including that of war situations; while war is a legally declared course of action by constitutionally recognized groups.

### **Types of Conflict**

Experience in human society has shown that there are degrees of variation in conflicts. Conflicts are in types. Psychology as a discipline has espoused on intra-personal conflict. Sociology identifies inter-personal as well as intra-group or intra-unit conflict, as well as inter-group conflict. Political Science and History have identified inter-ethnic or intra-state conflict as well as international conflict.

#### *Intra-personal conflict*

This refers to a state of implosion in an individual shaped by the state of mind. It is however important to know that such human state is largely dictated by circumstances around him. Such situations are anger, depression, confusion, frustration, which could lead to aggression, erratic behavior, addiction and in extreme cases, suicide (Ross, 1993). This is the kind of conflict that has been described as “man against self” (Lamb, 2008), in which man continues to contend or battle with his mind and habits. Smoking, drug use, alcoholism, as well as lying are some addictive habits that man may continually contend with; even when he desires to stop, he may find himself continuing it. This is intra-personal conflict or “man against self”.

#### *Inter-personal conflict*

This is what has been described as “man against man” in the micro sense. This type of conflict may be direct opposition, as in exchange of blows, a gunfight or a robbery, or it may be a more subtle conflict between the desires of two or more persons (Nikolajeva, 2005). A boxing or

wrestling match is a kind of game, but the act on the mat depicts conflict. Conflict in this sense is a fight between people. However, conflict does not always translate to physical exchange of blows. Malice or 'cold attitude' to each other already underscores conflict. Conflict thus also means implicit hostility. It may not be obvious to the third party, but the disagreeing or unfriendly parties already understand that there is a state of discontent between them.

#### *Man against society; man against nature*

This is an interesting type of conflict. Morell (2009) posits that "man against society" type of conflict arises when man stands against a man-made institution or practices. These may include slavery, human trafficking, child prostitution, human rights abuses, bullying, corruption, bad governance, et cetera. According to her, "man against man" conflict may shade into "man against society". "Man against nature" is the type of conflict that depicts a state of contention between man and his environment (Lamb, 2008). Such forces of nature as global warming, climate change, rainstorm, hurricane, desertification, resistant malaria, killer insects, et cetera create a situation in which man battles with nature to overcome and master it.

#### *Family conflict*

This type of conflict occurs in a family unit. Sociologists would describe this as intra-unit conflict. In most cases, these conflicts arise from crisis occasioned by familial roles, expectations and role conflict. Examples include father-son, mother-father, husband-wife, brother-sister conflict. It may also imply cousin-cousin, nephew-uncle, sister-in-law or brother-in-law conflict. Such conflicts may be caused by such factors as simple as rudeness, claim to seniority, laziness, truancy at school, lying; to such extreme cases as land, property, inheritance and will dispute.

#### *Inter-Group conflict*

This refers to the kind of disagreement or feud that takes places between two or more sectarian or religious groups, ethnic groups, communities, or interest groups. The contention between Christians and Moslems in Nigeria is a classic example of inter-faith conflict. Nigeria has been riddled with clashes between members of the two faiths since the 1980s. The Maitatsine riots in Kano, Bulumkutu crisis in Maiduguri, Sokoto university campus riots over use of Othman dan Fodio's daughter's name in a pageant, Cross vs. Crescent crisis at the Ibadan university, among others, are worse scenarios of this (Folarin, 1997). The Boko Haram Islamist terrorist onslaught against Christians and the Nigerian State since 2009 has however, become the worst in the annals of Nigeria's religious conflict. In terms of ethnic conflict, there have been: Igbo-Hausa feud that began after the military coup and counter-coup of 1966, culminating in the Civil War in 1967, Efik-Ibibio conflict, Tiv-Jukun debacle, Fulani-Birom clashes, and Itsekiri-Urhobo-Ijaw conflict in the Niger Delta. Intra-ethnic or inter-community conflicts include Ife-Modakeke, Umuleri-Aguleri, Andoni-Ogoni, and Egba-Awori (Ota) clashes.

### *Intra-State conflict*

This type of conflict is confined within the borders of a sovereign state. Such economic factors as land, uneven development, resource control and revenue-sharing formula could cause a conflict within a state. Social factors as value differences as had been the case in old Sudan could also cause conflict. Socio-ethnic factors such as real or perceived ethnic balancing or ethnic cleansing such as in the case of the Nigeria-Biafra episode and Rwanda genocide chapter in 1994, could also be a factor. Political factors such as power-sharing, power equation or zoning formula in public administration, lopsidedness in political appointments, quota system and the likes could cause intra-state conflict. Other examples of intra-state conflicts are the Malian crisis, Ivorian crisis, Libyan conflict, conflict in the DRC and Central African Republic.

### *Inter-State conflict*

This type of conflict is also known as international conflict. This is a conflict between two or more states. In some cases, this type of conflict degenerates to a state of war. We must remember that all wars are described as conflict. As such, all inter-state wars are same as international conflict. Inter-state conflict can be caused by territorial encroachment by another state, breakdown of diplomatic ties, exportation of toxic or contrabands to another country, et cetera. In the 1980s, Nigeria almost cut off diplomatic ties with Italy because hundreds of tons of toxic substances dumped at Koko, a sedate village in Delta (Bendel) State, were traced to the European country. Nigeria and Cameroon have had cases of hostilities on a number of occasions, over Northern borders and lately, Bakassi Peninsula; but none ever resulted in full-scale war. The United States and Cuba have been in a perpetual state of conflict since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Examples of inter-state conflict that resulted in war include Iran-Iraq of 1980-1988, Britain-Argentina War of 1982 over the Falkland Islands, USA-Afghanistan War.

### *Global conflict*

This should not be mistaken for inter-state conflict, although it also connotes international conflict. This kind of international conflict however transcends the type which involves two or more sovereign states. It is however instructive to note that a conflict between two or more states could become a full-blown global conflict. The Serbia-Austrian conflict of 1914 resulted in the First World War. The German-British conflict of 1939 culminated in the Second World War. There are also cases of global conflict not directly caused by states. The rise in terrorism has escalated to a global conflict in which the whole world is battling with the scourge of global terrorism and working in concert to fight it.

### **Forms of Conflict**

There are certain forms or manifestations of conflict, which we must quickly and briefly examine. We have looked at war. Now, let us examine revolt, insurgency, mutiny, and (but not the least) protest. *Revolt* refers to 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. *Protest* simply refers 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. For instance, in 2012, the South African police killed 34 miners who were peacefully protesting poor conditions of service.

*Mutiny* 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 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.

*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.

### **Theories of Conflict**

Theories of conflict are the explanations put forward to explain causes of conflict. The causes of conflict are numerous and complex, thus creating problem of analysis of specific conflict situations. The theories are advanced to simplify the causes by looking at them in categories.

The theories explaining causes of conflict include *structural* theory of conflict, *Marxist* theory, *international capitalist* theory, *realist* theory, *biological* theory, and *psychological* theory of conflict.

#### *Structural Theory of conflict*

The structural theory attempts to explain conflict as a product of the tension that arises when groups compete for scarce resources. The central argument in this sociological theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured or organized. It describes the condition of the society and how such condition or environment can create conflict. Structural conflict theory identifies such conditions as social exclusion, deprivation, class inequalities, injustice, political marginalization, gender imbalances, racial segregation, economic exploitation and the likes, all of which often lead to conflict (Oakland, 2005).

Structuralists maintain that conflict occurs because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies or because of domination of one class by another. The theory is however

deficient in its on-sidedness of looking at causes of conflict. It, for instance, does not see the bright sides of racial or ethnic diversity and the strength that a society may derive from pluralism. It only sees the flaws. The structural theory thus makes sense only when conflicts are viewed from the broadest possible perspective, and only if the observer opts to ignore alternate causes of the conflict.

### *Marxist Theory of conflict*

The Marxist theory is an offshoot of the Marxian explanation of society. Society is divided into unequal classes: the one is strong, rich and noble and bears the tag of bourgeoisie, who controls the instrumentality of state; while the other is deprived, socially deflated, financially infantile and is called the proletariat. There is a constant struggle between the two, but he that has the financial muscle controls both the state and the poor, and that is the structure of society. Thus, the Marxist stand is that the state is itself a product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms (Lenin, 1917). The state is therefore structured to be in a perpetual state of conflict.

The rich controls the state as well as means of production. The rich thus grows wealthier at the expense of the poor, who lives at his mercy and is implicitly embittered by the development. The central argument of Marxism is thus that capitalism is at the heart of the state, and that same capitalism is exploitative and oppressive and has been responsible for the polarization of the society (and state) into two incompatible classes.

The limitation of Marxism is similar to that of structuralism. It looks at every issue of conflict from the viewpoint of dialectical materialism alone. This economic prism is not enough to capture every aspect of conflict causation.

### *International Capitalism Theory of conflict*

This theory captures the historical import of colonialism and imperialism. According to Hobson (2006; 1902), in his classic, *Imperialism: A Study*, the external drive of western nations propelled by the Industrial Revolution began to create numerous platforms for conflict. The search for raw materials, need to invest surplus capital and search for new markets outside Europe compelled an imperialist pathway as the western countries desperately sought such markets, raw materials and investment climates at the expense of the peace and prosperity of the locals in what is now known as the Global South. This led to colonization, as well as collision of cultures and civilizations and ultimately conflict.

Imperialism thus became the last and highest stage of capitalism (Lenin, 1917: 43). This international capitalism theory aptly explains the collaboration of western financial markets and capital today, as it solidified and extended their economic influences all over the world, and has leveraged them for economic exploitation of the developing economies, which has created imbalances between what is now the North and South.



### *Economic Theory of conflict*

Economic theory of conflict explicates the economic undercurrents in conflict causation. There is considerable interface between politics (power, resources or value) and scarcity. People seek power because it is a means to an end, more often, economic ends. Communities feud over farmlands, grazing fields, water resource, et cetera, and groups fight government over allocation of resources or revenue. Scarcity, wants, needs, or the fear of scarcity is often a driving force for political power, contention for resource control, and so forth. Conflict is thus not far-fetched in the course of such palpable fear or threat of scarcity. Just as the fear of poverty and deprivation could lead to fraud or corruption; so is threat of or real famine, deprivation, mismanagement of scarce resources, could propel conflict over resource control.

### *Realist Theory of conflict*

Political realism explains conflict as an inherent attribute of man. As far as men live with their 'baggage of emotions', so will conflict remain a part of their habitat; and as long as man remains a 'political animal' with interests different from others, so shall conflict of interests remain a feature of society. More importantly, as long as there are scarce resources where most men are ambitiously seeking comfort or control of resources, conflict is inevitable. Realism is a good blend of the Marxist, international capitalist and economic theories in the explication of conflict.

The realist theory describes conflict as a product of the innate selfish nature of man, who continues to pursue his own best interests even if the ox of others is gored. This selfish nature of man leads to "competitive processes" between actors who seek to have all or most of available scarce resources. It is such attribute that is taken to the inter-state level, which leads to erratic behavior, hegemonic propensities, imperialism, et cetera, that can impel resistance as well as violent opposition and consequently heat up the international system.

### *Biological Theory of conflict*

This theory explains that human nature is genetically transferred from generation to generation. Just as parents can genetically transfer their godly qualities and ingenuity to their offspring, so can the evil nature of man be genetically transferred. The argument goes that since our ancestors were instinctively violent beings and since we evolved from them, we must bear aggressive or destructive impulses in our genes.

This theory explains that the irresistible outbreaks of violent impulses are ascribed to fixed biological propensities. As such, aggression is spontaneous and could be uncontrollable. This line of thought underlines the assumption about the greatness of certain people, clan or family; or the pride, arrogance and aggressiveness of a particular nation or group.

### *Frustration-anger-aggression*

This is a psychological hypothesis of conflict that posits that it is natural for man to react to unpleasant situations. The hypothesis is drawn from the frustration-aggression theory propounded by Dollard and Doob, *et al* (1939), and further developed by Miller (1948) and Berkowitz (1969). The theory says that aggression is the result of blocking, or frustrating, a person's efforts to attain a goal.

Frustration is described as the feeling we get when we do not get what we want, or when something interferes with our gaining a desired goal, as shown in the case of Niger Delta, and that of the Palestinians or Hutus in Rwanda. Anger implies feeling mad in response to frustration or injury; while aggression refers to flashes of temper (Tucker-Lad, 2013). The frustration aggression theory states that aggression is caused by frustration. When someone is prevented from reaching his target, he becomes frustrated. This frustration can then turn into anger and then aggression when something triggers it.

When expectation fails to meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront others they can hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions or someone on whom they can take out their frustrations. And when aggression cannot be expressed against the real source of frustration, displaced hostilities can be targeted to substitute objects, that is, aggression is transferred to alternate objects.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the types and causes of conflict at an introductory level. It therefore has no pretensions whatsoever of claim to covering the entirety of theories and typology of conflict. It has however attempted to establish the factuality of inevitability of conflict and the technical variation between conflict and war, particularly as they affect the study of politics.

Conflict is inherent in society because the latter is structured to produce conflict; just as it is inbuilt in the human nature to have flashes of temper. There have always been the haves and the haves-not, the strong and the weak, the dominant and the vulnerable; a situation that is often accompanied by perpetual struggle between the divides. These are the stimulating factors in local and international conflict, as well as the basic characteristics of the global human society.

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