

## Review

# Tracing contemporary Africa's conflict situation to colonialism: A breakdown of communication among natives

Afisi, Oseni Taiwo

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria. E-mail: [oseni.afisi@lasunigeria.org](mailto:oseni.afisi@lasunigeria.org), Tel: 08023223278, 08075921393.

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The problems of violent conflicts in Africa today can be traced back to situations deeply rooted in exploitation and colonial domination of Africa. As far back as the days of the Atlantic slave trade to the period of colonial subjugation, Africa witnessed one form of violent conflicts or the other virtually unprecedented in the life of a typical African. Further on was the scramble for African territories which eventually created artificially bounded nation-states. Similar was the divide and rule method, which alienated Africans from Africans. This method characterized the policies of the various colonial administrations. This paper admits that conflicts, not on a large scale, existed in pre-colonial Africa. It also examines the traditional methods of resolving these conflicts in pre-colonial Africa particularly among the Yorubas. However; the paper traces the incessant ethnic/tribal conflicts or the civil wars on a large scale that have pummeled various African societies since independence to the invasion of the continent by European colonialism. It examines the implication of the partitioning and creation of artificial boundaries in Africa and how it leads to a breakdown of communication among artificially bound natives. The paper submits that the various violent conflicts in Africa are a direct consequence of colonial domination.

**Key words:** Colonialism, conflict, native communications, African, ethnic

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a fact of life. It exists, not only among *Homo sapiens*, but also in nature and all living organisms. In the human society, it could be regarded as a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument. Stagner (1967: 16) sees conflict as:

“a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both; each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation, and each party perceives the other as a barrier or that to that goal”.

It should be noted however that conflicts need not necessarily be violent. Conflict only becomes violent when it is not well handled either by the authorities or parties concerned. What usually happens is that conflicts turns violent when one of the parties involves feel a

sense of superiority over the other and wishes to win by force the opinion, view, argument, material possession etc. only to his side.

It is pertinent to assert that pre-colonial African societies were believed to have witnessed one form of conflicts or the other. Many of the societies were believed to have fought one another for many different reasons ranging from expansionist motives, show of supremacy or economic underpinnings. But generally speaking, wars or conflicts in pre-colonial Africa were not recorded to have occurred on a large scale as it is seen in today's Africa.

We cannot but affirm the fact that contemporary conflicts in Africa, radically different in almost every other respect, have one element in common: their roots lie in colonialism. Indeed nowhere does the colonial burden weigh heavier than in Africa. Thus, one of the legacies left by colonialism is undoubtedly large scale conflicts and bloodshed among native Africans.

It is rational to further stress that conflicts occurred in

pre-colonial Africa, as it's a fact of life among social beings. But nowhere has it been recorded that Africans before the advent of colonialism fought tribal wars without caution and regulations. In his book, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, Madiebo (1980: 18) buttresses this point:

Despite the fact that there were tribal wars fought in Africa before colonialism, Africans never celebrated war, unlike what obtained in Europe at the equivalent period. Even when wars were fought in Africa, the period, weapons, combatants, targets of the war, and even matters concerning asylum were regulated. Generally, wars were fought in the dry season and away from towns and villages.

Records have it that many different forms of sociopolitical organization existed in pre-colonial Africa. Marvin Perry (1974:264), in his book, *Man's Unfinished Journey*, mentions that the ways of living of the many different peoples in sub-Sahara Africa varied from region to region. Often even those living near each other had different ways of organizing their families. Their languages were different, and the gods they worship had their own local identities. Each tribal group had its own traditions about ancestors who had founded the families that made up the tribe.

### **TRADITIONAL AFRICAN WAYS OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION**

In his paper entitled, *The Fate of Women, Children and the Aged in Contemporary Africa's Conflict Theatres*, Nwolize (2001:15) points out that Africa in the pre-colonial era had very effective and efficient controls over the waging of wars before the coming of the colonial masters.

According to Nwolize (2001:16), Africa in the pre-colonial era had very effective and efficient control over the waging of war before the coming of the colonial masters. The controls formed part of traditional Africa's code of honour which was based on the social values of the people, and covered all facets of human interaction, from commerce, through marriage, child up-bringing, and farming, to war making, conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as peace making, peace building and confidence building.

In traditional Africa, all efforts were always made to avoid war, as Africa did not celebrate war. However, where all efforts failed, war was fought. But was not engaged in without declaration through the sending of emissaries or signals. It was seen as an act of cowardice to attack an enemy without warning. This was because such surprise attacks could affect women, children, and the aged, and visitors, which were never intended.

It should be noted that adult males were the human targets in wars. Women, children, the aged and visitors were never attacked in wars. Women were never molested or assaulted. In some areas during wars, women, children, and the aged would be removed to the sea area if it were perceived that war will reach villages or towns. In other areas, warriors would protect women and children in villages. To attack a village where women and children were kept was regarded as an act of cowardice. Also, strangers were never killed.

Again, weapons of war were regulated according to the degree of blood relationship of the belligerents. Poisoned arrows and spears were not allowed in wars in which the objective is to strike not killing. Basden (1996: 260) informs that among the Igbo:

In a fight between relations, or people of the same town guns were forbidden, while machetes, spears, bows and arrows, staves, and such like weapons were permitted, but at the same time not permissible to use them indiscriminately. There must be no fatal wounding.

These periods of war were regulated in several areas. For example, fighting was not done in the planting or harvesting season in the Eastern part of Africa, as that was invitation to famine, hunger and starvation which would affect mainly children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and the aged. Thus fighting was carried out mainly in the dry season.

In pre-colonial Africa, wars took place far away from homes in villages, and occurred at the boundary areas and thick jungles. This was to avoid harm to children, women, the aged and strangers who were non-combatants. So, since there were no pitched battles and expeditions waging like religious or ethnic wars, battles were not allowed to stretch for too long at a time. Among the Yorubas for example, the *Areona Kakanfo* (the war general) was not allowed to wage a war for over three months without the authority of the *Alafin* and his council. The methods of combat, in pre-colonial Africa, were also restricted. Wars can be fought in which only striking and not killing was allowed. Also, ambushing may be forbidden at times. Generally, striking the enemy from the back was forbidden as it was seen as an act of cowardice. A man must be given the chance to defend himself.

Usually, wars ended by the defeat of one party, through negotiated settlement, or withdrawal of one or both parties. But where a party lost, peace-making was made a honourable affair. Agreements were painstakingly reached and kept faithfully. The fate of losers was made less burdensome and incapable of provoking future war.

To avoid women, children and the aged, in pre-colonial Africa during conflicts or wars, was one of the most cherished rules in the conduct of war in traditional Africa. Women were regarded, protected and respected as the

sacred sources of life necessary for regenerating the society and ensuring its survival and continuity. They were immune from attack during periods of war.

As for children, they occupy a very unique status in the life of every African man, women and family. Because children were seen as special blessings from God, and because of the visible desperation with which men and women pray and look for them, as well as the enormous energy, pain, and resources spent on them, their welfare and upbringing, children were the second category of protected persons in African traditional war or conflict situations.

The aged or elderly people were protected because age is highly respected in Africa. The aged people direct the young ones with their wisdom and experiences, and moral leadership. They were seen then, and even today, as mobile human libraries, particularly in Africa that had very little records and documentations before colonial invasion. (Nwolize: 2001: 20).

Again, within the traditional Bakonzo tribal culture of Uganda there were different processes for managing and resolving the different conflicts that occurred in society. Land disputes, cases of adultery or fornication, murder, and domestic conflicts such as quarrels at home or between neighbours were dealt with using slightly different methods. Methods similar to those traditionally used by the Bakonzo to resolve community conflicts were also used by the Banyabindi and Basongora tribes to settle their differences.

The family was the basic unit for the traditional Bakonzo social organisation, with the children of the family living in homesteads around the courtyard of their father, as head of the family. If a conflict broke out within the family, the family head would call everyone together to discuss the dispute and settle it together. If it was not possible to reach agreement, the matter would be dealt with by the *mukulu wa bulambo* – the chief elder. The head of the elders' council (*basokya*) would be told and called together with the other elders in a meeting to discuss the problem. (Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice: 2007: 32)

The aggrieved parties would present their cases in front of the elders who would give advice on possibilities for reconciliation. On the basis of the advice given by the elders, the chief elder would pass a judgment over the matter in the form of an agreed decision, for which consent was sought from the parties to the disagreement. When the elders were deliberating over the dispute, they would drink from a jerry-can of local beer (*ekyisha kyo bwabu*), which the party found to be at fault would eventually have to provide. A meal was later prepared at which the two conflicting parties were expected to share from the same dish, with the person found to be at fault responsible for preparing the meal. (Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice: 2007: 33)

In a study conducted by Mathey et al (2003: 41) among the Zande:

The elderly woman was respected by all, and played a key role in crisis management and conflict resolution. Thus, when a conflict degenerated into armed violence, an appeal would usually be made to a third party of mature years to calm the tension and reconcile the combatants. Such an appeal for mediation was usually made to a woman who enjoyed the consideration and respect of all who knew her.

The same study revealed that if war broke out among the Zande, "the oldest women of the clan would go to meet opposing clan, and to interpose themselves between the fighters in order to make them see reason. When words proved fruitless, the women would threaten to expose their nakedness or to go down on their knees. In either case, the gesture signified a curse for those who bore the responsibility for such grave acts. Because of the respect that the enemy soldiers had for the women, they would usually put down their weapons before the fateful acts were accomplished."

The same conflict mediation charisma is reported of women among the traditional Burundi people. According to the researchers, Ntahobari and Ndayiziga (2003: 16):

Although the traditional Burundi society was organized and structured in ways that encouraged cohesiveness and peaceful coexistence, from time to time, like any other human society, it experienced conflict. Conflicts arose between individuals, within a family, between different families or between the inhabitants of different territories. To manage such conflicts, traditional society had well-organized regulatory machinery in which women generally played a major part. Under this system a woman was recognized as having an advisory role, behind the scenes, mainly where her husband was concerned, and as playing an active part in strengthening solidarity and social harmony generally. Within this structure, women played the more unobtrusive yet leading substantial role, both in their families and within their own circle.

Again, according to Mohamed (2003: 103) who studied traditional conflict management tactics in Somali,

In some parts of the country, women at times employed desperate measures to stop inter-and intra-clan wars. They formed a human chain, lined themselves up between the warring parties, and refused to leave until the two groups backed down. Their immediate objective was to see to it that the two armies did not shoot each other. A related objective was to bring in alternative conflict resolution methods based on dialogue and peace." According to him, too, if in the thick of a battle, a woman stepped in front of a man about to be killed,

that man's life was spared. In this way, women played a key role in saving the lives of those considered to be of high standing in the community. This act often created an environment that enabled the warring parties to settle their differences peacefully and to establish good relations.

It could be seen from the foregoing that what operated in traditional Africa was a systematic way of preventing and managing wars and violent conflicts. Women, children and the aged were protected. Even wars that concerned adult men were regulated. But that was a sharp contrast to what operates now in Africa. Today, there are always the barbaric attacks against women, children and aged people in war and violent conflict situations like what we witnessed recently during the conflicts between Israel and Hamas in Palestine in early 2009.

### **TODAY'S AFRICA'S CONFLICT SITUATION: THE ROOT OF THE MATTER**

The problems of violent conflicts in Africa today can be traced back to as far back as the 400 years trans-Atlantic, East African, and North African slave systems and dynamics specifically between (1450s – 1850s), through this system, Africa's sons and daughters numbering over 400,000,000 were violently and dehumanizing seized and taken to Europe as sellable commodities. The methods of acquiring these slaves introduced violence, rape, murder and torture, all of which cheapened and degraded human life to scales never known in Africa. Even in the plantations, streets, and homes in Europe, their masters subjected these Africans to greater inhuman treatments (Nwolize, 2001: 26).

As slavery was ending in the 1850s, Europe was packaging another round of violent visitation against Africa. This invasion took off in earnest after the Berlin conference of 1884 – 1885. Colonialism came with further violence, as Fanon would also make us believe. Vandalism, murder, torture, looting, rape, death and destruction were also the order of the days. It was aided by the Christian religion, which was directed at capturing the minds of Africans, as colonial military forces captured the land and body of Africans. Between colonialism and the foreign Christian religion, African culture and social values were discredited. Both conspired to 'kill' the dignity of the African and dismantled Africa's political system.

However certain perceived assumptions could have informed this colonial construction of African savagery which was used to justify the nature of colonial warfare. This perceived assumptions might have been based on certain arguments like that of Lucien Levy Bruhl (1985: 63) who standardized the colonial discourse when he commissioned rationality as a Western signature, and thus granting what he termed mystic or prelogical thinking to non-Western peoples. These denigrating words in par-

ticular refer to the African.

In a similar circumstance, Hegel in his *Philosophy of History* speculates about the continent of Africa and asserts that Africa proper "is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night". To Hegel (1956: 93) "The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas--the category of Universality". Hegel here states that Africans lack the category of Universality and also situates the African to the level of irrationality. "The Negro," Hegel (93) writes, "exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state". The African was, to Hegel, a complete moron who had no idea of decency and could not distinguish his right from left.

These arguments might have informed the colonialist's actions and reasoning to invade and conquer the territories of the perceived Dark Age. To their amazements, the colonialists were met with a strong opposition of a well organized and structured army of a people who were bent on defending their territories. Thus, the African resistance to colonialism led to further violence. Africans responded to European force with force. The Ashanti, for instance, offered determined resistance to British rule. The Matabele of Zimbabwe tried to check British expansion. In Sudan as well as Dahomey, the French met with a lot of difficulties and resistance. Again, during the Mau mau revolt in Kenya of the early 1950s, women were arrested, detained, and jailed because they were seen as the passive arm of the revolt by the British government, for the women supplied arms, food, clothing and medicine to the guerrilla army, and maintained the lines of transit and recruitment supply (Nwolize, 2001:27). While in the prison, the mau mau women were beaten, and many died, and others were made to buried the dead. Girls were tied to carts to pull food and load in the prison while the women worked.

It was the same story of violence, rape, murder, barbarism, and savagery, from Mau Mau in Kenya, through the Algerian revolution against France, Libya's 20 years war of resistance against Italy, Iva Valley massacre at Enugu, Nigeria, or the Gutu Massacre in Zimbabwe.

But with the emergence of the African States at independence, political power, which was taken away by the colonial masters from traditional political leaders, who had African values and code of honour in their minds, was handed over to a new set of elite tutored in European political, cultural, economic and social systems of thought. Military rule set in a few years after independence, militarizing the society and entrenching further, the culture of violence. During military rule in Africa, there was no respect for fundamental rights. No freedom of speech or expression of the press. Violence culminated military regimes. Maiming, killing and public execution of armed robbers and political activists were also the order of the days.

While these happened, foreign films and pornography

glamorized violence and sex, portraying women as sex objects. New European value systems emerged in Africa with people copying negative values.

In recent times, African states could no longer cope with the needs of their citizens and every one is left to depend on himself. This led seriously to unemployment, and angry and hungry youths take advantage of the situation, thereby unleashing terror and violence on the rich and affluent. The Niger-Delta youths in Nigeria who have taken pleasure in kidnapping expatriates and leaders of the community as a means to show their displeasure with the Nigerian government and oil companies over the environmental degradation in the region, as well as the level of poverty and unemployment among youth in a region where the resources of the entire nation is obtained is a point of reference in this regard.

We can at this juncture state categorically clear that inter-ethnic classes and other forms of violent conflicts in Africa in contemporary days emanate as a resultant effect of the partitioning of African in 1885 in Berlin. The colonialists grouped different ethnic groups together for easy administration. Thus even after colonialism the effect of this partitioning is seen today in Africa as violent conflicts between two or more human beings who desire the same goals.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN AFRICA**

It is pertinent to mention that the African continent began to suffer real devastating impact of gunpowder from the period of colonial invasion. After the colonial conquest the next round of war devastation came when some nations took up arms to fight the colonial masters from the 1950s to 1990s. For examples; Libya, Kenya, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. Nations that did not fight the colonial masters fought themselves in the post-independence era in civil wars; for example, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Niger, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and some others (Nwolize, 2001: 8).

Some other African countries fought their neighbours; Libya versus Chad, Tanzania versus Uganda, Ethiopia versus Somalia, Ethiopia versus Eritrea, Nigeria versus Cameroon and some others. Some African nations suffered double tragedy – fighting the colonial masters and then fighting themselves e.g. Angola, Mozambique and some others.

Additionally, there are internal violent conflicts all over Africa, terrorism, land based riots, communal clashes, ethnic clashes, religious riots, chieftaincy riots, Coups, armed robbery and so on.

Most of these conflicts all over Africa, particularly, have led to millions of deaths of men, women and children. For example, the Nigeria civil war consumed an estimate of three million people, the Liberian civil war 150,000 while the war in the Congo (former Zaire) has led to the lost of

over two and half million lives.

Violent conflicts have also caused millions of refugees and displaced persons all over Africa, and these are mainly women, children and old people. These conflicts have destroyed houses, infrastructure, farm crops and so on. It is unfortunate that, a continent that lacks developmental capital, threatened by drought, rampaged by ignorance, and disease, and cannot feed its entire population, is faced with such violent conflicts. Many of these African countries cannot even pay their workers salaries regularly, yet, they import weapons for fighting themselves or their neighbours, thereby encouraging violent conflicts indirectly.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF SOME VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA**

There has been on record several violent conflicts in Nigeria particularly since 1929 Aba women riot in which the Aba women of Southeast Nigeria reacted to the introduction of taxes levied on women. In 1953, there was again the Enugu Coal Miners riot. There was the Kano riot between 1965 and 1966, and in the same year there was the Western Region Election Crisis in Action group of leadership tussle between Awolowo and Akintola. Also, in 1966, there was the Hausa/Fulani and Igbo ethnic crisis as result of the assassination of Colonel Aguiyi Ironsi, the then Military Head of State and Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, the then Governor of Western Region. Ironsi was on a visit to the Western Region and he was killed with his host Fajuyi. When Colonel Yakubu Gowon subsequently became the military head of state, the Igbos perceived Ironsi's assassination as a Hausa agenda. This situation led to the Hausa/Fulani and Igbo ethnic crisis in Nigeria. Between 1966 and 1970, there was the Nigerian civil war. This was between the Nigerian troop and the Biafran troop. The Igbos, after the assassination of Ironsi, led by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu declared their intention to secede. Hence, the state of Biafra was born as a sovereign state. The Nigerian government fought Biafra in order to quench the attempt. It was a civil war which claimed millions of lives on both sides. But Biafra recorded more casualties. The Biafran troop was captured and annexed back to become part of Nigeria,

Again in 1978 during the General Obasanjo military regime, there was the student's crisis with the inscription on their placards as "Ali must go". Colonel Ali was the then federal commissioner for education. In 1983, there was the presidential election riot when President Shehu Shagari won his second term election defeating Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was the presidential Candidate of the unity party of Nigeria (UPN). Members of the Unity party of Nigeria believed that the election was rigged in favour of President Shehu Shagari.

In 1991, there was the anti-sap riot. The Structural

Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced by the first military president Ibrahim Babangida was believed to bring economic harshness on the people. Hence, the riot for its cancellation. In 1992, there was the Zango – Kataf Crisis. This was between the Hausa-Fulani versus the Kataf. Again, in 1993, there was the Igbo-Hausa clashes in Kano.

Also in 1993, there was the June 12 Presidential Election crisis. This was as a result of the annulment of the June 12 election result by the military president Ibrahim Babangida that was worn by chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawole Abiola.

In 1998, there was the Ilaje – Ijaw clashes and the Kuteb – Chamba class. Again, in 1998 and 1999 the Ijaws clashed with the itsekiri. Particularly, in 1999, there was the Yoruba – Hausa crisis in Shagamu and a reprisal in Kano by the same ethnic groups. Also, in 1999, there was the Aguleri Umuler clashes. In the year 2000, there were the Sharia riots in Kaduna and some other Northern states. It was a riot, which the Christians in the Northern states of Nigeria reacted to and would not want to be ruled by the laws of Sharia just introduced in the North. In 2001, there was in Nassarawa state the Tiv – Hausa crisis. And in 2002 specifically, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, there was the Yoruba versus Hausa clashes in Idi-araba a suburb of Lagos State in which many lives were lost, and many houses were burnt and properties destroyed. The latest is the Boko Haram crisis in Borno State and some adjoining Northern states in 2009.

It is to be noted that within these drama of violent conflicts women and children are increasingly becoming targets of savage and barbaric attacks.

## **THE BREAKDOWN OF COMMUNICATION AMONG NATIVES**

The carving up of the African continent was done in Berlin in 1885 by men who never even seen Africa before. These men divided Africa for their own reasons without considering the African people. One of the major fallouts of this exercise was the incessant conflicts among native Africans. A breakdown of communication occurred among Africans bound together through artificial boundaries. A colonial amalgam that became the root of the problem of communications breakdown.

One of the consequences of the communications breakdown among native Africans is the bloodshed that is witnessed today on the continent. Without adequate understanding of the topography, the cultural differences of the people as well as the language of different tribal or ethnic groups, Africa was partitioned with unwieldy circumstances. What now exists are people of different tribes who speak different languages artificially bound together. These are people with supposed different or varied cultural and political administrations. These are people who never understood each other's languages

and ways of life. Thus, when such situation occurs there is bound to be misunderstanding which may lead to violent conflict. That is indeed the situation in Africa today where the artificially bound natives do not clearly understand themselves regardless of the English or French language as lingua franca as the case may be. Nigeria, for instance, is a clear example of an artificially bound nation-state. It is a country with over two hundred (250) ethnic groups and languages. The sociopolitical and economic interests of the different tribal groups differ in character. Thus what have been witnessed in the political history of Nigeria are civil wars and violent conflicts among the different tribes as we highlighted earlier.

The different policies of the colonial administrations also brought about the 'divide and rule' tactics which the imperialists used to keep the natives at bay. The apparent implications of this tactic usually result in conflicts among different tribes. In Nigeria, for example, the Christianized Igbo people were at some point favoured by the British, as against the Muslim Hausas. The tune changed later at the turn of granting independence to Nigeria.

The French policy of assimilation and the British policy of indirect rule used local elites in Africa for their styles of administrations, but the Belgian style of administration led by King Leopold II in Congo, was believed to be paternalistic. Thus, the colonial masters left a border legacy of violent conflicts and civil wars in Africa because of the breakdown in communication among natives. The scramble for Africa which occurred in Berlin in 1885 was an indication of no regard for humanity for the natives. Those borders are according to Prunier "the most global and most dangerous results of colonialism".

The colonial amalgam having no regard for tribal loyalties merged people of different heritages and nationalities and made them members of the same state. Paradoxically members of the same tribes were separated from each other. There exist, for example, the Yoruba speaking people of West Africa in South West Nigeria and the border lines of Benin Republic and Cote d'Ivoire; the Afar tribesmen in Djibouti are also found in Ethiopia and Eritrea; the Ewe people in West Africa are already seeking to be united with their fellows across national borders; and similarly, the Lozi people of Namibia, Zambia, and Angola have begun to agitate for a common homeland (Ford: 1999: 2) the Hausa people are also found scattered around the Northern parts of Nigeria, Sudan, Ghana, Niger and Cameroon etc. What all these signify is the fact that Africa was partitioned unjustly without any recourse to tribal or language affinities. The partitioning to us led to a breakdown in communication among artificially bound natives who were not of the same language speaking tribes and were not ideally suppose to live together as citizens of the same country. The violent conflicts, for instance, between the Hutu and the Tutsi of Rwanda which led to a genocide was a result of communication gap between the two

tribes. (Peter Ford 1999) clearly captures this communication gap scenario between the two warring tribes in Rwanda and how the colonial overlords contributed to the fuelling of the crisis. According to Ford:

.....before Hutu murders went on a genocidal rampage in Rwanda, Paris had supported the Francophone Hutu government there with guns and money against the minority Tutsi, who spoke English and enjoyed backing from the Anglophone Ugandan authorities. Then President Francois Mitterrand of France saw his policy simply as a continuation of the old colonial rivalry that his country had maintained with the British since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One may begin to wonder if our claim to communications breakdown among native Africans is the root of all the crisis enumerated above particularly the highlights on some of the violent conflicts in Nigeria given the fact that most of events examined were political crisis and not colonial. But the root of the matter is that the colonial intervention in African affairs and the continued neocolonialism in Africa today can be said to be contributory factors to the political crisis. Tracing from the pre-colonial political crisis days in Nigeria, to the very recent Hutu and Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994 which was indirectly fuelled by the divide and rule tactics of the imperialist, one cannot but trace the violent conflict situations in Africa to colonialism. The advent of colonialism in Africa and the subsequent partitioning of African territories among colonial lords is the root of communications breakdown among native Africans which often result into violent conflict situations.

However, one major factor at the heart of violent conflict in Africa with its root in communication breakdown among native Africans was the radical imposition of language on the colonized. The damage done to language by the colonial over-lords was captured by Ali Mazrui in his book *The Power of Babel*. In the work Mazrui points out that the whole of Africa had been zoned into language groups such that Africans now see themselves as a country speaking a foreign language. Mazrui (1998: 6) observes:

...and yet Africans describe their countries as being English-speaking in spite of the fact that the proportion of speakers of these imperial languages is so small, and in a manner never encountered in ex-colonial Asia. One of the gross linguistic anomalies of post-colonial Africa, in fact, is that whole classes of countries are named after the Imperial language. We do constantly refer to Francophone Africa, English-speaking Africa, Hisophone Africa and the like.

This is what makes Fanon become concerned about the issue of language as an instrument of colonial domination. To him, the colonialist language is a deliberate

instrument of domination and alienation and its effect is an erosion of the African cultural and political heritage. Fanon (1967:55) reiterates:

That the colonized persons who speak the language of the colonizer are ipso facto assuming the latter's culture. A primary function of language in the colonial situation is, in other words, to facilitate and promote cultural and political domination.

Our position here is harped upon the fact that language is one's identity. We talk in language and think in language. Language is a man's whole world and it is also in language he expresses it. It is a way of thinking, of feeling, of being. So foreign language, when it is foisted on the colonized, fosters the identity crisis. One gets alienated from his own roots when he uses foreign language in place of his mother tongue (Afisi, 2008: 103). The adoption of a lingual franca by different nation states is essentially intended to make all tribes speak the same language but indeed the situation has done more harm than good. It has not only totally de-Africanized the African, it has contributed immensely to the breakdown in communication among natives by way of alienating them from the traditional African values and knowledge of conflict prevention and management.

## CONCLUSION

Life in pre-colonial era in Africa was believed to be held in high esteem. It was not a thing of joy whenever anybody's life was taken or a person's blood was spilled. Which is one of the reasons war or conflict, though inevitable, was not encouraged or celebrated. Nwolize (2001: 13) captures this:

Life was taken in high esteem and the people would revolt against anybody that takes another person's life unjustly. There was, in traditional African societies, the sacredness of human life and as well as sanctity of human blood. There was freedom and equality of men. Justice, equity and fairness especially in sharing public or private resources. Communal life laced with cooperation and collaboration, accommodation, tolerance and compromise. Honour and love for one another. Customs and traditions of a people are being proud of one's culture. Bravery in the face of danger and gallantry in war.

It should be noted that, what happens today in the world, particularly, in Africa –were never heard of in the conflicts of pre-colonial Africa. Not that there were not wars and violent conflicts in pre-colonial Africa, but they were not as escalated as what is on ground in recent times. The traditional African ways of controlling and managing violent conflicts are what have been enumerated in the body of this paper.

It is important to point out at this juncture that Nwolize's

traditional African methods of controlling and managing violent conflicts as used as a model in this work is fraught with a lot of exaggerations. We sincerely subscribe to this model but we however, feel that it should have been more specific or be narrowed down to a more specific African society. Granted that pre-colonial African societies witnessed non of these atrocities of barbarism, savagery and others, that are occurring in conflicting situations in Africa today, a mere specifics would have sufficed for Nwolize.

Again, the traditional conflict management models which considered the role of women in this affair are novel and worthy of emulation in contemporary times. Of course women today, except for few, are only considered to be seen and not heard. What this implies is that traditional African societies respected the views of women and took as important the roles women play in societal harmony.

Very importantly, this paper uses as an addendum to all the different models of traditional conflict management and prevention strategies already examined in the body of this work, Lawrence Bamikola's concept of Agba (Elder) as arbitrator in Yoruba sociopolitical model for conflict resolution. To Bamikole (2008: 1), in traditional Yoruba society, Agba (elders) were usually relied upon as agents of conflict resolution in view of certain qualities possessed by this category of human beings.

It is therefore noteworthy to conclude that there were mechanisms, institutions and methodologies at various levels of the traditional African societies of means of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. No doubt, it is a veritable mechanism to preventing, managing and resolving violent conflicts different from what is obtainable in our world today. It is clear that military solutions to violent conflicts have not provided the needed peaceful solution in the world. The United Nations Organizations' has also not been successful in averting, resolving or managing conflict on the global arena. Thus, we propose that Bamikole's concept of Agba (Elders) be used as a model for conflict resolution. Bamikole's proposition is that the Agba (Elder) who resolves conflict must first put his/her own home in order. Thus, the elder who wishes to mediate in conflict at the community, national, regional or world levels must first put his/her family in order. It is therefore our submission that both the Nwolize's general idea of traditional African method of resolving conflict and bamikole's concept of Agba (Elder) as arbitrator in Yoruba sociopolitical model for conflict resolution are veritable alternatives to current means of resolving conflicts.

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