Review

An assessment of ethnic conflict and its challenges today

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In this article we shall begin by defining ethnocentrism. According to anthropologists, the concept combines the belief that one's own culture is superior to other cultures, with the practice of judging other cultures by the standards of one's own culture. Sociologists and social-psychologists extend the term to group attitudes shown by religious, economic, racial, caste and class group within a larger social order. Ethnocentrism is also defined as a feeling that one's own group has a mode of living, values and patterns of adaptation that are superior to other groups. This leads to a generalised contempt of members of other groups. In conclusion, the paper points out that in its extreme form, ethnocentrism may lead to violent cultural conflicts and ethnic cleansing. This is followed by possible solutions to challenges raised in the paper.

Key words: Ethnic conflict, ethnocentrism, culture.

INTRODUCTION

Clarification of terms

Different scholars have given their understanding of the term ethnocentrism. According to anthropologists, the concept combines the belief that one's own culture is superior to other cultures, with the practice of judging other cultures by the standards of one's own culture (Den Van, 1970).

Ethnocentrism is also defined as a feeling that one's own group has a mode of living, values and patterns of adaptation that are superior to other groups (Haviland, 1993). Ethnology is the scientific study of the origin and functioning of humans and their cultures. It is a major branch of cultural anthropology.

Ethnocentrism is a human universal phenomenon. It is believed by some scholars to be as old as the human race (Kasomo, 2010a). This stand is justified thus "right from childhood we learn what is good, moral, civilised and normal according to our culture (Horton and Hunt, 1968)." As a human universal reality, ethnocentrism is said to be more pronounced in modern nations than in pre-literate "tribes"

Developed countries

People in developed countries of Europe and America

tend to despise other nations and their customs terming them as queer and foolish, just because they are different from their own. The "western church' has not been spared from prejudices and biases about African religion as revealed by missionaries attitudes (Hiebert, 1997). It is believed that enthnocentrism is a major cause of problems between the western industrialized portion of the world and the developing nations.

Ethnicity and the related concept of cultural identity are essentially ambivalent concepts; they may assume a positive as well as a negative connotation (Kuria, 1998). However, the negative aspects it appears to be over emphasized in the societies. It is for this reason that this paper may appear to over emphasize this negative connotations and the negative effects and manifestation of ethnocentrism.

Major sources of ethnic conflicts

An ethnic conflict is connected with land issues, resources, struggle for power and leadership or education, the former is genocide on a large scale (Mario, 1998). Ethnic cleansing is the worlds' horrifying manifestation of ethnocentrism. Genocide is, in fact, killing members of one people or simply imposing measures that present their growth in population. It is the

annihilation of a people or part of it. In genocide's killings are planned, intended and carried out systematically using any weapon, be it crude or sophisticated.

THEORIES OF ETHNOCENTRISM

Scholars still speculate on the origin of ethnocentrism as no single theory can claim to have the whole truth. When one considers the ancient biblical story of the Egyptian Pharaoh who ordered the killing of all Hebrew males; the 1990 - 91 Gulf war, recent development in Rwanda, Burundi, Yugoslavia and the former Soviet union and needless to mention Kenya in a series of after election violence/land clashes, it is evident that ethnocentrism is a universal phenomenon.

Constructivist's theory

This is a school of thought that considers ethnocentrism as a social construction. Thus, they hold that ethnicity can be constructed.

Psychological theory/ primordialism

This is presented as the most conservative of the three theories. It tends to overstresses the primordial ties and makes them unquestionable or ineffable. Thus, the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community speaking a particular language and following certain social practices (Freud, 1947). This cognition's of blood, speech and customs are seen to have an ineffable and at times over powering coerciveness in themselves. This theory further states that the primordial ties lead to a creation of a natural community. Naturally, such ties are stronger and older than the modern nation- state. The elements are passed from generation to generation forming a sort of historical continuity.

Structural theory

Ethnocentrism is generally held not to be a fact of human nature "but a result of particular conditions." ethnocentrism is caused (Mafeje, 1971).

ETHNOCENTRISM: HISTORICAL MANIFESTATIONS

Classifications of peoples have been ideologically created, in which other peoples' right to life was denied simply because they were looked upon differently. Therefore, cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide emerge from situations that support the attitude of "US"

and "Them". They have this but we don't, they worship differently from us, they are a danger to our security, they speak a different language from us, they want to seize power from us, they have killed our own, they have more wealth than us, they have taken our land among others. These are some of the reasons given for ethnic killings and cleansings.

Although, Africa has, of late, experienced some of the worst consequences of ethnocentrism, it should be noted that the problem is universal. In Africa, the problem has had a long history. In other words, the current manifestations of ethnocentrism are based on the origins of various ethnic groupings, preferences, attitudes, politics, colonialism, evangelization of Africa and other powerful external pressures, such as neo-colonialism with its economic and social implications. With time, certain stereotype behaviours have been formed consequently leading to the present realities facing Africa. The Rwandan and Burundi Genocides of 1994, and 1992, 1997, and 2007 ethnic conflicts in Kenya have not only shaken the continent of Africa to its basic foundations, but also the whole world.

The symbolic visit by the secretary general of the UN, Dr. Kofi Annan, to Rwanda in 1998 and in Kenya 2007 indicated the level of international awareness and credit that has been achieved.

Ethnicity in itself does not connote a negative attitude. On the contrary, ethnicity indicates a gift of God which makes us different for our mutual enrichment. It is God who makes each of us as what we are. Ethnicity gives us our social and cultural identity as well as our security. The individuals find their roots and values in their ethnic groups. One should not apologize for belonging to a particular ethnic community.

Since Africans are deeply religious, we should discuss and theologize within the ecclesial and historical experience of violence in Africa (Bujo, 1986). There is a believe that if we have to address the phenomenon of ethnocentrism in a systematic manner, it is proper to give it a historical approach.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN ISRAEL

The book of Exodus chapter one tells us that Pharaoh who did not know Joseph ascended to the Egyptian throne. He gave orders that all the new born babies of the Hapiru (Hebrews) be killed at birth. Here is an example of a genocide based on demographic fear. The Pharaoh said, "Behold, the people of Israel are too - many and too mighty for us (Exodus, 1:9). The able men were turned into slaves. This incident is usually attributed to "Pharaoh Rameses II who ruled from Ca 1298 - 1232 BCE (Thairu, 1985). This move by the Pharaoh was in fact an incitement of his people to commit genocide against the Jews.

When ethnocentric feeling gets both legal and religious backings, it can lead to senseless ethnic cleansing and genocide as the Israelite history shows. From 1914 to 1918 the First World War was fought and millions of people died.

EUROPE

The worst manifestation of ethnocentrism in Europe was realised under Hitler of Germany. During the Second World War (1939-1945) over 6 million Jews perished in the Nazi concentration camps. Hitler was out to ensure the survival of the pure Nazi race with blue eyes, special hair, intelligence, special height and even with special shape of the nose. The Jews did not qualify, hence the extermination policy. Around this time, the ethnic clashes in Greece between 1944-1949 left 160,000 people dead. The Russo - Hugarian war of the same period left 10,000 people dead (van de Goor Luc, 1996).

ETHNIC TENSIONS AND CLASHES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ethnic clashes and even genocide's in Asia are mainly due to land problems; crave for autonomy and religious differences. The conflicts between the Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese and other Arab states, have been mainly over land since 1947 and time of Moses in the Bible.

The conflict between Kuwait and Iraq in 1990 leading to the Gulf War in 1991 is another evidence of ethnic clash over land. Saddam Hussein has never abandoned his claim that Kuwait is the 8th Province of Iraq.

ETHNIC TENSIONS IN EAST ASIA

In the 1940s and 50s the Chinese attacked and destroyed many Buddhist Monasteries in Tibet. They have also tried to destroy the Buddhist culture (Mc Laren, 1995).

ETHNIC TENSIONS AND CLASHES IN LATIN AMERICA

Conflicts in Latin America are mainly political in nature. They involve the masses rising up against their governments or a group of elite's organizing themselves to challenge the regimes. The people of Latin America are reacting against harsh military governments, corruption by politicians and bad economic policies. This has been done with heavy human losses. The 1960 and 70 saw guerilla movements in El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay and Chile.

Some of these countries carried out ethnic cleansing under the pretext of fighting against communism during the cold war periods (Storey, 1996). This was the excuse General Agusto Pinochet used to kill thousands of opposition activists. There were also clashes with the local Indian population. This has been the case in Guatemala. The colonial authorities did not recognize the right of Indians. New governments have not addressed, sufficiently the Indian problem. One can even say that political rulers in the developing countries, like those in Latin America form themselves into a special (privileged) political "ethnic" group against their own people. This isolation leads to conflicts with untold human costs.

ETHNOCENTRISM IN AFRICA PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA

In pre-colonial Africa, there were numerous nation to nation conflicts. The colonial powers called them tribal or ethnic conflicts.

African ethnicity has been explained by anthropologists, colonial administrators and missionaries as "tribalism" and the groups consisting it as "tribes" (Sanneh, 1984). It is important to note that many of the so called "tribes" did not exist before the colonial conquest (Magesa, 1998). Many of the peoples of Africa have no word for tribe. There were only words for nation, clan and lineage. In traditional Africa set up therefore, there could only have been nation-to-nation conflicts, inter-clan or family feuds within a lineage.

Although, Africa has problems peculiar only to the Continent, it is also true that many of the reasons for ethnic tensions and conflicts we have seen so far can be found here. The most common causes were migrations due to drought, war, diseases or need for greener pastures for the animal keepers. This was common among the Oromo-Galla, Nilotic and the Bantu's. Land expansion also often led to conflicts in pre-colonial Africa. The peoples who lived along the Coast often clashed due to slave trade introduced by the Arab Muslims. Kidnap of family members by a neighbouring clan led to clashes with some loss of life. This was true in West Africa and along the East African Coast. It is important to note that feuds between various African peoples were ended as soon as possible with a treaty or a covenant, by which the two parties promised to maintain peace.

However, the wronged party was given a compensation which acted as restitution. In Traditional Africa the political leader was also a religious person (Magesa, 1998).

Societies laid no firm distinction between religious and political life, between church and state. The religious, political, cultural, administrator and military institutions all dovetailed and overlapped distinguished only by the ceremonies that accompanied their authority.

The dual responsibility checked the political excesses in pre-colonial Africa. If a leader failed to live up to the -

expectations, he was simply removed from power without blood shed and replaced by the next leader in line (Mugane, 1999).

COLONIAL AFRICA

"In the middle of the 19th century, it was thought that the people living outside of Europe or North America, as it were, lived a previous stage of the development of mankind", (Hans van Doome, 1993). If you wanted to study a people who still lived close to the origin of the humankind, to the apes, or to the cave people, one of the best places to visit was Africa. African was termed as primitive and dark continent. A hotel in Nairobi Kenya during colonial times was label dogs and Africans are not allowed.

Some African Communities during missionaries' evangelisation were given conditional baptism because the Europeans could not ascertain if they were human beings because they were too black. Conditional baptism goes like "If you are a human being I baptise you in the name…" The earliest anthropologists, who preceded the colonial masters, came out to prove that their cultures were superior.

That is what they did. It was no wonder that the colonial authorities had no regard for the people of Africa. They were not consulted on important decisions.

At the Berlin conference of 1885, Africa was divided between the European powers of the day without the consent of the local people. Boundaries were drawn hastily, leaving a part of the same people in one country and a part in another. By this Berlin accord, Europe planted seeds of discord in Africa (Kyeyune, 1997).

POST-INDEPENDENT AFRICA

There is no doubt today that Ethnic conflict is afflicting many African countries instability and violence are the order of the day. "As affirmed by recent horrors in Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and elsewhere, Africa is ethnically a conflict-ridden continent. In some countries the conflicts have been so severe that a state no longer exists, or if it does, it is extremely weak. Such is the situation in Somalia and Sierra Leone today. This brands Africa a continent that can only produce babies and Poverty and that is not true.

Conflicts for religious reasons have been realised in Uganda, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Algeria and Nigeria. The mainly Muslim Hausa north and the Ibos in the south have had serious religious conflicts. Although the conflict in the Sudan should not be reduced to mere religious conflict, religious differences between the Christian South and the Muslim North plays a big role in this conflict that has cost millions of lives. Thanks be to God Southern Sudan today is an independent Country but that is not the end but a beginning.

Colonial powers came in and created "Tribes" and ignorantly put traditional enemies under one roof (Ott, 1998). For example the Buganda and the Banyoro were traditional enemies grouped together. The other tribes of Uganda take its name from the Kingdom of Buganda. The other Kingdoms must accept that they are Ugandans. The most example is the case of Rwanda and Burudi. Each country has a population of Hutus, Tutsi and two constantly at each other's threat today it has subsided. In Sierra Leone the Creoles (descendants of America slaves) were grouped with the Mende and the Temne people.

Kenya is no exception either. The Luo have to accept that they belong to a country called Kenya, when the majority of them have not even seen Mt Kirinyaga. There are Teso in Kenya and in Uganda, Sabaot in Uganda and Kenya, Bukusu (Bagishu) in Kenya and Uganda, Somali in Kenya and Somalia, the Maasai in Tanzania and Kenya and the Luo in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. We must note that the colonial policy of divide and rule heightened ethnic animosities suppressed only by the colonial presence. Some "tribes" were seen to be good cooks and watchmen, while others were good shamba boys. Only a few selected and trusted people could serve in clerical capacities.

At Independence, there were these disparities. Some people found themselves disadvantaged because of the roles they had been assigned by the colonial power. Churches also followed the government strategy of divide and rule. Certain areas were for the Anglican (Kikuyu) Luhya and Luo.

The Methodist took Meru while the AIC were given Ukambani and Kalenjin land. Kikuyu and Chuka accepted Presbyterian church. The Luo and the Kisii were identified with SDA. Islam remained for the Costal peoples. The Catholic had a bit here and a bit there. Today things are changing.

Another problem in Africa is illiteracy. It is said that if you want to hind your money put inside a book no a few Africans will discover it. The leaders easily resort to ethnic feelings to gain cheap support. This is easy because a strong since of nationalism and statehood has not yet been achieved. The gap between the people and their leaders who were largely trained in Europe and America widened at Independence (Storey, 1996).

They were more educated than the soldiers who they appointed to ensure security. Soon, the African armies began to see the leaders as closer to the former colonial masters than to them. What followed were *coup de ta* that has led Africa into serious problems.

So the founders of African states like Kwame Nkurumah of Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Milton Obote of Uganda, Ago stingho Neto of Angola, Patrice Lumumba of Congo (later Zaire and now Democratic Republic of Congo) were all overthrown. The people preferred the semi-illiterate soldiers who spoke and

thought like them, so Marcia Nguema, Amin Dada, Bokassa, Samuel K. Doe, Mobutu and other soldiers were born. These soldiers got strong support from their ethnic groups.

The cold war period created a lot of problems for Africa. The countries that were aligned to the Soviet Union such as Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia were ported as enemies of pro-American countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Zaire. In the 1970s when Somalia and Ethiopia fought over the Ogden region, the Soviet Union secretly supplied each side with arm! The warring clans on the border of the two countries carried out what was close to genocide.

Many of the new African leaders are accused of nepotism and ethnic favouritism (Adeyemo, 1993). Of course, when a ruler favours members of his family and ethnic group, it does not mean that all their people have been favoured, unfortunately, this is what the general public thinks is the case. In Africa, the presidency is not a symbol of unity, but one of favour to ones group.

This is why in Kenya, the President is a symbol of"eating'. The Kikuyu ate during the Kenyatta era and are now eating under Kibaki era. The Kalenjins ate under Moi. Each of the other tribes are trying to be as close as possible to Kibaki. You never know, power may fall on Raila Odinga and he will invite "all" the Luo to "eat".

In the meantime, the other Kenyan ethnic groups will prepare their appetites as they move closer and closer. It is this perception that led to the "ethnic" clashes. The Kalenjin leaders convinced their people that it was Moi who was under siege. If he was removed from power, then the Kalenjin were not going to continue eating. Many people got killed by people who were nowhere near the "Moi Meal", while those who were actually doing the eating were safe with their families at home.

Some African leaders have been known to arm their own peoples to ensure that they are protected in times of turmoil (Bate, 1994). President Juvenal Habryarimana is known to have armed the Interwar before the genocide in Rwanda. Obote of Uganda had armed his Nilotic Northerners and disarmed the Southern Bantus. This caused a lot of dissatisfaction. The Moi government is said to have armed the Kalenjin warriors with bows, arrows from Korea and with guns. Such countries have seen serious ethnic confrontations. The latest reason for ethnic animosities in Africa is the introduction of Multiparty system.

Africa can be seen as a pathological continent suffering from, 1) Pathology of backwardness; 2) Pathology of Economic Fragmentation and 3) Pathology of Maldistribution of Natural Resources.

Pathology of backwardness

Africa as a continent has always been seen as the continent that lacks in creativity. It cannot produce anything of its own but many babies and poverty.

Pathology of economic fragmentation

African continent can be seen as small blocks. Each country has its own economic policy. It is survival for the fittest. We have therefore no economic strength. We have to ask for aid. Africa cannot stand on its own. And unless Africa becomes an organised continent, Africa will continue to suffer to the glory of the west. Africa has to move away from a begging condition.

Pathology of maldistribution of natural resources

Africa can be seen as a single group of rich people living in ivory towers while the masses are sinking in the ocean. Unless we get rid of these billionaires and create a democratic system then Africa will continue suffering. Unfortunately each class tries as much as possible to bar others from rising to their class. These are sinful structures not only in the secular world but also even in the Church. Unless we evoke our ancient traditional heritage like the spirit of generosity, Hospitality, communitarianism among others Africa will continue begging endlessly.

CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS

In this paper, we have shown that the usage of terms such as ethnic, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, "tribe" and nation have not been strict and very often misleading. The paper has also shown that ethnicity is God's gift to us, and that ethnocentrism is the deification of ethnicity. Ethnic belongings do not cause the so called ethnic clashes.

The destruction of all social mechanisms, rules, institutions and the reduction of social differences, groups and classes to the one and only difference of ethnic belonging are the actual causes of these conflicts, and the confusing term "ethnic" conflicts is suitable to conceal all these underlying causes. Real causes of conflicts are usually political, economies, religious, cultural, linguistic and social in nature (SECAM Bishops, 1997).

It has been clearly stated, that ethnocentrism is as old as humanity, and that it is a worldwide problem (Chinchen, 1997). As much as it is true that the Africa continent seems to be in constant turmoil, it would not only be myopic, but also too unfair to suggest that the problem is largely an African one. Recent developments in Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union States and East Asia, are a glaring example.

To reduce African problems entirely to, the so called, "multiethnic nature" is to miss the point (West, 1984).

This work has traced Africa's present conflicts to hastily

drawn boundaries by the colonial powers. They divided the people. This is why the newly independent African States have not been able to create the requirements of assimilative or integrative nationhood, and our governments have failed to convince their populations that they share a common culture and a common goal.

The colonial mentality was that Africans were inherently "tribal" and that they should never be detribalized (Wakano, 1985). In that way the people could never gang up against the colonial authorities. So the African peoples had to be bounded and hounded into units called districts and provinces which were created along tribal times.

But again to reduce all Africa's turmoil's to its colonial past would be dishonest on our part. Many independent African States still keep the colonial legacy. Divide and rule tactic works very well for them.

Kenya is the best example in the whole of Africa. Her leaders have perfected the colonial art of dividing people along their ethnic backgrounds (Kasomo (c) 2011: 90). Practically, all the new districts are created for specific groups of people who are judged to be pro- government. In Kenya, the Bantu speaking people tend to form their own political parties with their Nib- speaking counterparts forming their own. Kenya parliamentary and civic elections are increasingly determined by ethnic influence. This has led to a call by many of Kenyan politicians for the possibility of "Majimboism" (a federal form of government) (Karia, 1998).

All over Africa, therefore the so called minority "tribe" or ethnic groups coalesce into regional power blocks. This is an attempt to ensure that their interests take precedence over national affairs. They do this in order to oppose the leadership by major "tribes" (Mugane, 1999).

Some countries like Zambia have tried to reduce the problem by making Chichewe and Bemba languages the Lingua Franca, Middleton (1997: 97). However, those whose languages are left out feel they are not considered important.

We have also presented the fact that Africa's latest experiment with multipartysm does not seem to have any promising prospects. The mistake is in the fact that they are formed along ethnic lines, and therefore not broad based. In-spite of everything else, it is important to appreciate the fact that many people in Africa, today can with the coming of pluralism, criticize their governments without much fear as was the case a few years ago.

In order to make African peoples cohessive, a lot of good will have to be done in the area of socialization. Africa must play politics, economies, provide an education and accept religious faiths that give room for other people to be themselves (Kasomo, 2010 (b): 90). Many African states, as we have seen are suffering serious conflicts in the name of religious fundamentalism. Algeria and Sudan have been bleeding profusely on this account. Tolerance must be treasured and not a thing to be detested.

Finally, Africa should take consolation in the fact that,

those Western countries and America, which are relatively peaceful today, have had shocking history of violence worse than what Africa is experiencing at present. This is not to suggest that we should sit back and let things happen.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL ETHNIC CONFLICTS

- The UN peace-keepers should never be reduced to sitting ducks. It should be constantly alert and a strong force.
- Create an effective collective International Security System that will act as deterrence against the persecutors of different ethnic groups. Those who killed and maimed others should be arrested and tried anywhere in the world.
- The ideology of revolution as a means to problem solutions should be seen and understood as suicidal. It is not only fatalistic, but also refusals to give dialogue a chance.
- There is need to establish a programme of Popular Global Education for Development and Transformation" in each country. Stop grouping people in terms of "Us" and "Them".
- Religion and politics should not be separated. There is generally no specific "political" structure that is distinct from the social and religious structures of society. The same person usually occupies both positions."
- Stress the African value of communal ownership and African socialism (Ujamaa) and Ubuntu Philosophy.
- Resort to the Elder Tradition. This does not mean consulting only the old in the village. African elders today include politicians, economists, scholars, diplomats, church leaders, members of NGOs and elders in the village.
- Promote the Traditional value of peaceful dialogue and Conflict Resolution. Having brought the elders together, they must, in the spirit of the Traditional African value of a common consensus, sit down to talk.
- We do not need expensive conference halls or hotel rooms. We can use natural shades or village huts away from the modem worries and hurries of life.
- Bank on the African ability to forgive and forget painful experiences fast. For African Traditional Moral and ethical system an offence once forgiven is never recalled.
- The practice of restitution for wrongs done to others should be explored.
- The church in Africa should therefore promote a theology that promotes life. In fact, the focus of African religion is life. This is why killing is one of the worst crimes. Theology of liberation appears to be the relevant one for the bleeding continent.
- The solutions to ethnic tensions exploding into ethnic cleansing and genocide must be found by architectures themselves.

- No one has had a choice on where to be born. As such, one does not have to apologize for belonging to this or that ethnic group.
- We need to recognize the value of universities as a forum to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, and to fight ethnic divisions.
- Ethnic difference should never cause ethnic conflicts, genocides or ethnic cleansing. On the contrary ethnicity should be viewed as a gift of God meant for mutual enrichment.
- Encourage the African people to be missionaries to themselves

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