

ASSESSING KARL POPPER'S PIECEMEAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Conflicts are ontological realities that are pragmatically essential to human endeavour; as such we cannot rule out its pragmatic value to human existence, most especially when it reveals a lacuna that should have been taken for granted unknown to the people. Hence, there are conflicts everywhere in our society; and such conflicts exist in the family, religious groupings, political groupings even our personal lives. This paper focuses on political conflicts which generates from ethnic, religious and other dimensions unavoidable due to the very fact that conflict is part of human existence in addressing issues of social injustices. What is more significant of these conflicts are the way and manner they are managed and resolved by those in the position to resolve them. Nigeria in recent years has so many conflicts that are characterized in many forms which have developed into all manner of vices due to failure of conflict management by the State. Adopting an expository and analytic approach, the paper shall examine Karl Popper's Piecemeal Social Engineering (PSE) as a methodological approach to conflict prevention. The paper clearly addresses the problem of conflict management and interrogates the role of leaders as social engineers in conflict prevention.

Keywords: Conflict, Management, Piecemeal Engineering, Nigeria & Social Engineering

INTRODUCTION

The human society is a complex unification of unique personalities and traits. Man being a social animal, interacts and lives with other people in the society. It is in the course of the interactions, that he is able to position policies, ideologies,

agitations and convictions or conventions. This is an indispensable nature that he necessarily uses to repair the wounded parts of societal system when injured by others in the society. Remarkably, Aristotle says that man is a candidate for a civilized and interpersonal interaction to create order and achieve common higher goal. This is tied down to the fact that no one talks about social responsibility outside the effects of societal interactions and togetherness. (Messner 1965: 541) holds that the society is a community rooted in man's instinct and characterized by his social end. In a bid to pursue our individual interests in the society, conflict becomes inevitable. Because there will be exhibition of character traits according to individuals' interest. (Otite, 1999: 1) rightly posits that conflicts arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and/or groups in defined social and physical environments. Also, Mbia recognizes that;

Human rights provision and guarantee is an indispensable requirement of and democratic political system. It underscores the constitutionality and legality of government dealing with citizens, which profoundly determined the general climate of development in the country. Human rights observance is also as a criterion of determining the nature of relations between one government and another. It is not only an ethical but also an ideological issue which could lead considerable legitimacy or otherwise to any government. Indeed, the level of human rights performance serves as an important index for development (2007:108).

Conflict is a social necessity because social development and social engineering depends on it even though sometimes it might be negative. The problem is not really the existence of conflict, but man's action towards precautionary mechanism or conflict resolution and constant struggle for social reconstruction and engineering. The unique nature in everyman is what determines his reaction to issues and how he goes about his conflict. More often than not, it is the outward expression of internal rumble, which brings about conflict in the society. This is because by the vibrant arrangement of social order and interaction between the governments and the governed, just as Zahn says:

When social problems reach the point where they tend to become fixed elements in the social structure or begin to involve a major segment of the population, the situation is ripe for reform.... A great variety of movements, committed to an equally great variety of value systems, may develop to meet and solve the same complex of social problems (1964: 150).

For instance, the Nigerian method of conflict management is one that requires focus and an insight to chart a better scheme of conflict management. Ours is a situation where we wait for conflict to happen rather than taking precautionary steps to avert it. We mistake conflict for a situation which must be handled with iron hand, and this is replete in our antecedent as a nation from the military era down to the many religious and ethnic rivalries. The USAID in 2005 argues that the Nigerian government's capacities for managing conflicts are weak even at the points of their applications. This is because; the government has not fully considered the utility of every available strategy for conflict management, such as Piecemeal Social Engineering (PSE). Here, the position of Karl Popper becomes apt in conflict management and prevention. His differentiation of PSE from utopian social engineering and the suggestion of PSE require constant check and gradual development from our peculiar differences as a multiethnic and multi-religious nation as a result of the amalgamation of the British administration to a unified nation. Thereby, this paper examines Popper's PSE technique vis-a-vis conflict management in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria. It x-rays the recommendations of Popper as a solution to conflict management in Nigeria.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

SOCIAL ENGINEERING: There is scarcely a definition of social engineering, but one can glean from the compounding of the two words that, it has to do with fixing some loosed ends of the society, to suit desired needs and reposition the society for better growth. Societies always have one form of disorder or the other, and there are different ideas formed, which may not accord with the meeting of the societal goals, therefore, there must be effort to re-inform, reconstruct and restructure the societal norms. Social engineering is defined as a discipline in social science that refers to efforts to influence particular attitudes and social behavior on a large scale whether by government media or private groups in order to produce desired characteristics in a target population. Philosophically, social engineering is a deterministic phenomenon where the intentions and goals of the architects of the new social construct are realized. Social engineering according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is the attempt to change society and to deal with social problems according to particular political beliefs, for example by changing the law. Social engineering has to do with the society and its organizational structure to meet its goal, while engineering has to do with the control of machines or equipment using scientific method. Flowing from the

above, the individuals who constitute the society are the equipment or machines, while the engineer is the sociologists or social scientists who undergo the task of influencing the working of the society.

PIECEMEAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING

The method of piecemeal social engineering is a recommendation made by Karl Popper, a 20th century philosopher, to promote peaceful reformation and social stability as it rejects violent holistic social change. Piecemeal involves self-criticism, tactfulness and certainty and more scientific in character. Karl Popper used the phrase to denote different approach to reform. He contrasts these utopian endeavors with "piecemeal social engineering" (PSE). The method recognizes that "to engineer" means the sense of human capacity or capability to build up from what have been judged to be in disorder into an acceptable social construct. In his words:

When society needs reforming, the piecemeal engineer does not believe in the method of re-designing it as a whole. Whatever his ends, he tries to achieve them by small adjustments and re-adjustments which can be continually improved upon... (Popper 1945:66).

Considering that the methodological engineering of approaching or managing conflicting issues is by breaking the large human society into smaller groupings, and visit them each with the item of unity and peace, owing that the small groupings of people make up the large society, The piecemeal engineer knows, like Socrates, how little he knows. He knows that we can learn only from our mistakes and seeing the indispensable nature of the human person that is prone to errors and mismanagement of feelings and emotions that need to be checkmated, in order to maintain social group ethics and harmony that cements that social integration, he (the human person) will make his way, step by step, carefully comparing the results expected with the results achieved, and always on the look-out for the unavoidable unwanted consequences of any reform; and he will avoid undertaking reforms of a complexity and scope which make it impossible for him to disentangle causes and effects, and to know what he is really doing (Popper 1945:66). Such act of doing something pertaining the maintaining issues of social grouping and integration remains a continuous effort that every member of the grouping who desired the power of unity of the whole human society, works with the governments, to integrate the values of the human person for the resultant consequences of any social reformation and engineering made.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict resolution is a quiet herculean task, because people have contention over something that is desirable to each of them. The fact that the society is made up of social animals requires that conflict is inevitable; hence, modalities must be put in place to ensure that conflict is avoided and possibly managed even when it arises. Effective conflict management leads to peace especially in a multiethnic nation like Nigeria. Conflict management does not entail meeting people's needs in totality, but making disputing parties to shift ground to make for peace. What conflict management is depends on the view of the definer, and as such, few of the definitions will be apt. Conflict Management according to Gaya is synonymous to conflict regulation, it is for him, a way, a process or an informed method of working or engaging with those involved in a conflict by taking measures that reduce negative and destructive capacities or tendencies; hence, "it covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict, by being proactive. It encompasses conflict limitations, containment and litigation (Gaya 2013:95). It entails managing conflict to a level that can accommodate the conflicting parties and reduce the tension and Gaya rightly posit like Karl Popper that the process must be proactive, implying that effort must first be made to prevent it, and where not preventable, the tension must be managed to the barest minimum.

Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. It often covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables (see, Robbins, 2001; Osisioma, 2016). Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects. It is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of nonproductive escalation. Murphy (2015) asserts that conflict management entails the long term management of intractable conflicts. He further explained that it is the variety of ways by which people handle grievances standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they

consider to be wrong (Cf, Usoro, Ekpenyong & Effiong, 2014). Owing that; conflict management flowing from the above is effort or strategy geared toward achieving peaceful coexistence and arriving at a middle point or win-win situation for disputing parties to ensure that the tensions created by the conflict are managed and curtailed. Conflict management therefore involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for resolving conflict in the environment. It is a process that embraces all articulated strategies, interventions and institutional mechanisms in controlling the escalation of conflict.

KARL POPPER'S PIECEMEAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Popper's Piecemeal Social Engineering (PSE) is a theory that was proposed by Karl Popper as an attempt to tackle the conflict situation, especially within human socio-political landscapes. In his book entitled '*Open Society and its Enemies*' he introduced the theory of social Engineering in an attempt to tackle or manage conflict as a whole in the society. This is being done in the form of preventive measures and not corrective method as it is the case of utopian and closed society. For this, he asserts that, "The piecemeal engineer will, accordingly, adopt the method of searching for, and fighting against, the greatest and the most urgent evil of society rather than fighting for its greatest ultimate good." (Popper 1945:158). The Concept of Popperian's Open Society is with opposition to closed society that is characterized by belief in magical taboos. "A closed society resembles a herd or a tribe in being in semi-organic unit whose members are held together by biological ties-kingship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joy and common distress" (Popper 1945:173) . From the quote above, Popper tries to give background of what he intends to do. It shows that he is not advocating a closed society that is only confined to one particular group of people who are restricted from making meaningful contribution as this is the contrast with the open society. Here, open society "sets free the critical powers of man" where the ability to exert the use of critical reason is most highly valued. It is a society open to criticism, where within a democratic atmosphere each individual is free to express their own critical views towards the existing conjectures, being also free to proceed to their refutation. Hence, the Open Society is a dynamic arena of conjectures and refutations built upon the critical exercise of reason and within a democratic environment. In the Closed Society, individuals legitimate their source of authority not by an individual sense of responsibility in choosing between the existing options before a democratic consensus is reached, but rather on the

belief that a mystical or natural higher force is on the control of such society, regardless of the actions taken by each individual. The Closed Society is therefore closed to criticism, where the unquestioned belief in a higher source of power guides the way of living. It is a society adverse to change, teaching that "change is evil, and that rest is divine. Owing that, transition from the Closed to the Open Society, when analyzing the 'enemies' who hinder the smooth application of Popper's Social Engineering in conflict management, projects the possibility of understanding any social grouping by the forces of integration and togetherness. There are two most dangerous enemies of the Open Society; Historicism and Utopianism. In order to proceed to a proper reflection of the practical application of PSE in conflict management, let us understand clearly what Popper meant when he said, but the kind of experiment from which we can learn most is the alteration of one social institution at a time. For only in this way can we learn how to fit institutions into the framework of other institutions and how to adjust them so that they work according to our intentions'. According to Popper, it therefore means that for us to manage conflict in the society, we start from a single social institution which will provide ideas or which will serve as a guide to other institution and shape them very well. Unlike ideas of blueprint by which every rational action must have a certain aim. The purpose of this blueprint is to determine the ultimate or real ends which often is not so. Trying to manage the conflict as a whole, we might not arrive at ultimate ends. PSE is of opinion that even though there might be some defects on its part in its application to conflict situation, there can be readjustments which are not very difficult to do, less risky and less controversial.

PSE approach should not be based on a utopian blueprint since the blueprint constitutes an end in itself, draining all the resources and individual aspirations of each member of the Open Society. In that case, the society would cease to be opened as the individual purposes are replaced by a collectivist aspiration. Hence, the answer to whether PSE should be based on a utopia to motivate action in times of great struggle is no. However, one cannot deny that PSE can be based on an ideal. An ideal suitable to be changed over time and which does not replace the individual will of each member of the Open Society by a static collective end. While one may think that 'piecemeal purposes' have no idealistic dimension, being a mere dynamic of plural actions struggling against concrete evils, this is not absolutely true.

In contrast to the 'utopian blueprint' which portrays the dream, the ideal of a perfect society according to a certain mold, the idealistic dimension of the 'piecemeal purpose' does not aim at building the perfect society, it does not generalize perfection but recognizes that perfection may not be at all attainable and if it is, it is a variable concept from man to man (Hayek 1945:194). By being able to choose the purpose behind a single PSE's action without the necessity to coordinate the aim of such undertaking with a collective blueprint for society, we are in a position to choose our very own idea of perfection, of happiness and of personal will. Hence, we may say that the idealistic dimension of the plurality of 'piecemeal purposes' is to sustain the Tradition of Liberty, where each member of society is free to live according to their own will. But is this idealistic dimension of 'piecemeal purposes' motivating enough to outshine the motivational character of the utopian blueprint? The answer to this question is that the Tradition of Liberty may not be alone a sufficiently strong motivational ideal in order to outshine the utopian blueprint. As we have seen, in times of great struggles even democratic societies sometimes preferred the power of the utopias of Nazism and Communism than that of liberty, in an attempt to restore order and end conflicts.

However, the idealistic dimension portrayed by the Tradition of Liberty is what allows individual blueprints to coexist within the same Open Society and to have plural ways of life. Change epitomizes the permanent debate of ideas, the dynamics between their emergence and refutation, the possibility to pursue an individual idea of happiness and to discard it whenever one feels likely to only "if we regain the problem-consciousness which has been lost in the decades" and we will not "fail to recover the critical engagement in the realities of our social world which we need to do our job well." (Popper 1945:191). This recovery of critical engagement lets us leave the utopia blueprint behind, that "world of certainty" which will not allow us reach further (Popper 1945:193). The application of PSE in order to improve the current political framework translated into contemporary liberal democracies behind, that "world of certainty which will not allow us to reach further. Taking the Open Society for granted will worsen the motivational problem as the possibility to reach out for more will be nonexistent. For this reason, it is crucial to develop mechanisms in order to promote a higher critical reasoning spirit, for instance in the scientific and in the intellectual spheres and particularly towards the Open Society itself. The application of PSE in order to improve the current political framework translated into contemporary liberal democracies.

THE NIGERIAN STATE AND THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Since Nigeria became an independent state on the 1st of October 1960, stories covering the headlines over the years have been that of conflict either for the sole aim of survival, making an impact of creating dominance and relevance. The country being a multi-cultural state blessed with diversity in cultural heritage has not been able to see the rainbow blessing encoded in this unique gift. After the pronouncement of independence, a segment of the country felt sought secession from the entity as a result of perceived marginalization. At that time it became a conflict situation that was in need of urgent attention guided with technical orientation but then this was treated with kid's glove and resulted in bloodshed and turning the country to a theatre of war. The eastern part of the country felt they could not peacefully co-exist with the dominant northerners despite the fact that they produce the country's greatest source of income and got peanuts attention to their own needs. Somehow, this pathetic situation rested on silent lips after the staged Aburi Accord and the exile of the architect of the struggle, the contemporary Nigerian state shows clearly that the issue was roughly handled. This fraction of this paper will not reach completion without highlighting the different military government that dominated the existence of the Nigerian society for nearly thirty-six years with attendant coups, violent attacks and succession crowding the situations thereby, resulting to different conflict situation that this paper believed were not properly managed as at that as the impact still displays reflection in today's Nigeria. As a country colonized with the policy of association contrary to the French colonies who suffered grievous assimilation on their cultures, attitude and personalities naturally, it is expected that the Nigerian state should vary since even if any of the above were tampered with, it was at a very minimal level. We are faced with a situation heavy with plenty of conflict situations that are often swept down the carpet and never got proper attention.

Most importantly, discussing the political development in reference to social conflicts and communal unrests, one cannot but apportioned some blames to her military administrations in the past. With the development of this segment of this paper, one might be tempted to fall into the ditch of hasty conclusion that Nigeria's conflicts have always been in the past but it will be a philosophical fallacy of a hasty conclusion as the chain of problems continue till date. It is quite difficult to state categorically which economic system is practiced in Nigeria but then, the dominating tradition seems to be the capitalist and the mixed economic

systems which both encourage the survival of the fittest allowing only the strong to grow stronger and of course the weak to get weaker. One appreciates the fact that the military government under the Obasanjo's administration saw the need for a democratic Nigeria and handed power over to the people, to whom by constitutional baptism the sovereignty resides. The development became a double edged sword to the Nigerian state as ever since then from Obasanjo's regime, there has been no succession without conflicts. There has been emergence of different sect, terrorizing the peaceful co-existence of innocent Nigerian citizens across the country for a very long time. A very prominent example is the sect founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the northern state of Borno. The sect felt the only way they could create relevance was through conflict turning a better part of that region into cemeteries and refugee camps and bathing people with their own tears instead of water which is the ideal.

As a multi-ethnic country, avoiding conflict will surely be near impossible. The situation on ground makes the typical Hausa fellow from the North hold the notion that he is the only person who has the legitimate right to rule and he has been able to prove this over the years by dominating the political arena of the country for quite a very long time. Also, the Yoruba Nation fondly referred to as the descendant of Oduduwa, holds tight the notion that they are learned fellows, maybe because they had the first encounter with white colonialist on their arrival to the country.

The Igbos of the Eastern part of the country believes they control the economy of the country and are lords when it comes to making money. Of course, one will not neglect the minorities who are spread around the country from north to south, west and north who with little population, have not been able to gain dominance in the country. Erecting a society with this kind of structure was not intended, it is very easy for conflict to arise in this situation. When a segment tries to show dominance and acceptance then conflict arise. Most definitely, the Hausa man from the North will always want to be at the sunrise and sunset of every political event and if the Igbo man wants to partake in this political meal even with a clean spoon, it becomes a problem. So also, the Igbos will not want competitors when it comes to market strategies. The government has not been left out in this conflict development along the rope that has been tight to the history of Nigeria and the societal structures. Uneven distribution of national income across the country has given rise to conflict. It is not as though this paper neglects the effort of the government, religious bodies, technical bodies and even

concern citizens in solving these epidemics Nigeria have unfortunately found herself in but from a close observation, the government and other bodies have all been tackling issues only when they occur and not before they occur. Think of it, what if there was a proper reconciliation between the Igbos after the civil war, the relationship between the two parties will be a preventive measure aim at curtailing future occurrences.

THE IMPLICATION OF KARL POPPER'S PIECE MEAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING

In all, the questions and issues of human conflicts are that of social injustices, and these are results of undue political ethnic oppression, communal marginalization, religious manipulation, unbalanced distribution of commonwealth and the likes. The reign of social injustices are based on the cultures where the human rights associated with the valuation of natural law principles are neglected. Neglecting human rights is indispensably neglecting the valuation of social integration and cohesion, where every human life is promoted, protected and respected. One cannot neglect the power of human act, for the acting person indicates the man of lived experience, the influential existential ability that propels what happen to him or her in the future. We act reasonably to protect the human flourishing and development. Owing to the fact that; no meaningful human development is possible outside the institutionalization of human social cohesion and integration that helps the people to harness their potentials.

Popper's PSE theory reminds us on the needs to value little detail of human social cohesion and integration that help in eliminating all avenues of social conflicts, as a result of social agitations for the respect of human life and rights. When social growths of human and societal developments in term of political governance are discussed, one will want to question the constitutional values of social contracts that bind the governed and the government. For everything about political governance must be to sustain the ingredients of common good which are centred on the valuation of human life, rights and dignity. According to Bolatito Lanre-Abass and Emmanuel Layode:

Political governance generates and sustains legitimacy through separation of powers, responsive and accountable government, representation and inclusiveness, and protection of basic rights for all citizens. Creating

legitimacy involves expanded opportunities for participation, reduced inequalities across socioeconomic and/or ethnic groups, information transparency and anti-corruption measures, rule of law, and periodic and formal contestation for power elections (2016:89).

Therefore, PSE with the social consciousness of understanding the little things that matter presupposes the understanding of the working and propelling forces of human harmony and integration for proper realization of human meaningful development. Social harmony and integration are products of good political governance. For governance operates within the society as a baseline and fulcrum of development and morality of human lived experience helps to sustain human togetherness for peace and social order (Lanre-Abass and Layode 2016:90). It owes that human conflicts can be avoided when the individuals are fully and adequately integrated to value the rights and dignity that make them human beings and as human persons- the subjects of lived experience. To be human is to be socially integrated to value the otherness of human existence and living. Also, PSE projects that conflicts can be managed or curtailed when they are already escalated within possible social grouping, by possible re-orienting the individuals that formed such social grouping which have been bedeviled by conflicts, as a result of misconception and mismanagement of human rights and dignity, owing that no one can possibly live meaningfully in isolation and exclusion, and no meaningful development is possible in a society where human rights and dignity are trampled upon, and Nigeria is no exception.

Conclusion

This work has been able to draw attention to the fact that Nigeria as a country has not been able to be proactive in terms of conflicts. Although, conflict is part of human existence, it can also be prevented through conflict management. Management of conflict is very important so as not to allow it degenerate into unforeseen regrettable situations. Most times in Nigeria managers of conflicts tend towards “medicine after death” and at the end of the day, they become too reactive and get involve in Post conflict management. As such, Karl Popper’s piece meal social engineering provide the road map in ensuring that conflict should be managed beforehand rather than the resultant effect of the conflict. “Prevention they say is better than cure”.

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