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**Olatunji Alabi Oyeshile****ETHNIC CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA:  
THE ONTOLOGICAL, ETHICAL AND POLITICAL IMPERATIVES**

*States in Africa have been retarded in socio-political development due to perennial problems which do not seem to abate in spite of numerous efforts to resolve them both internally and externally. This paper examines the problem of ethnic conflict in Africa, which is one of the perennial problems confronting states in Africa, with a view to resolving it and make room for sustainable development in Africa. The paper focuses on the ontological, ethical and political imperatives in resolving the problem of ethnic conflicts in Africa. The ontological imperative borders on personhood, and the self in relation to others viewed from a broad perspective of relationship among ethnic nationalities in Africa. The Kantian categorical imperative, as an ethical paradigm, is appropriated to underscore the need to treat others as ends in themselves and not means to the satisfaction of other people's end. The political imperative dwells on such factors as justice, equality, freedom, tolerance and other democratic principles. The absence of the identified imperatives have been responsible for unending ethnic conflicts in Africa. This paper adopts the analytical, critical and reconstructive methods. It analyses the various factors associated with ethnicity, especially from political, religious and economic dimensions and then makes a critical appraisal of these factors. It then reconstructs the features of ethnicity with a view to providing a viable route to development in Africa through the ontological, ethical and political imperatives. It submits that if the ontological, ethical and political factors are given adequate cognizance through a considerate and sympathetic impartiality then ethnic conflicts will be resolved to such a level that there will be sustainable development in Africa.*

**Key words:** Ethnic conflict, Development, Africa, Ontology, Personhood.

**Олатунҗи Алаби Уйшал****ВИРІШЕННЯ ЕТНІЧНИХ КОНФЛІКТІВ І РОЗВИТОК В АФРИЦІ:  
ОНТОЛОГІЧНІ, ЕТИЧНІ ТА ПОЛІТИЧНІ ІМПЕРАТИВИ**

*Соціально-політичний розвиток держав Африки гальмується через багаторічні проблеми, які не втихають, незважаючи на численні зусилля (як зовнішні, так і внутрішні) спрямовані на їх усунення. У цій статті досліджено проблему етнічних конфліктів в Африці, запропоновано шляхи її вирішення задля створення можливостей сталого розвитку. У статті розглянуто онтологічні, етичні і політичні імперативи вирішення проблеми етнічних конфліктів в Африці. Онтологічний імператив, що межує з особистісністю та власними інтересами щодо інших розглянуто з широкої перспективи взаємовідносин етнічних груп Африки. Категоричний імператив Канта, як етична парадигма, використовують задля наголошення на необхідності ставитися до людей як до цілей, а не як до засобу досягнення цілей інших людей. Політичний імператив містить у собі такі фактори: справедливість, рівність, свобода, толерантність та інші демократичні принципи. Відсутність зазначених імперативів є причиною безперервних етнічних конфліктів в Африці. У статті використано аналітичні, критичні та реконструктивні методи. Проаналізовано різноманітні фактори, пов'язані з етнічною приналежністю, особливо її політичні, релігійні та економічні аспекти, а також проведено критичну оцінку згаданих факторів. Стаття також відтворює риси етнічності з метою віднаходження життєздатного шляху розвитку Африки через онтологічні, етичні та політичні імперативи. У статті стверджено, що у випадку, коли онтологічні, етичні і політичні чинники будуть адекватно усвідомлені на засадах неупередженості, етнічні конфлікти будуть вирішені до такого рівня, що дозволить Африці стало розвиватися.*

**Ключові слова:** етнічний конфлікт, розвиток, Африка, онтологія, особистісність.

**Олатунҗи Алаби Уйшал****РЕШЕНИЕ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ КОНФЛИКТОВ И РАЗВИТИЕ В АФРИКЕ:  
ОНТОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ, ЭТИЧЕСКИЕ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ИМПЕРАТИВЫ**

*Социально-политическое развитие государств Африки затормаживается из-за многолетних не утихающих проблем, несмотря на многочисленные усилия (как внешние, так и внутренние), направленные на их устранение. В данной статье исследуется проблема этнических конфликтов в Африке, предлагаются пути ее решения для создания возможностей устойчивого развития. В статье рассматриваются онтологические, этические и политические императивы решения проблемы этнических конфликтов в Африке. Онтологический императив, граничащий с личностностью и собственными интересами по отношению к другим, рассматривается с широкой перспективы взаимоотношений этнических групп Африки. Категорический императив Канта, как этическая парадигма, используется для подчеркивания необходимости относиться к людям как*

к целям, а не как к средству достижения целей других людей. Политический императив включает в себя такие факторы, как справедливость, равенство, свобода, толерантность и другие демократические принципы. Отсутствие указанных императивов является причиной непрерывных этнических конфликтов в Африке. В статье используются аналитические, критические и реконструктивные методы. В ней проанализированы различные факторы, связанные с этнической принадлежностью, особенно ее политические, религиозные и экономические аспекты, а также проведена критическую оценку упомянутых факторов. Статья также воспроизводит черты этничности с целью нахождения жизнеспособного пути развития Африки через онтологические, этические и политические императивы. В статье утверждается, что в случае, когда онтологические, этические и политические факторы будут адекватно осознаны на основе беспристрастности, этнические конфликты будут решены до такого уровня, который позволит Африке устойчиво развиваться.

**Ключевые слова:** этнический конфликт, развитие, Африка, онтология, личностность.

### **INTRODUCTION. Why the Interest in Africa?**

One may say that Africa has become so important to the rest of the world, more in the negative perspective than in the positive perspective. However, it is not the case that we do not have Africans who are making giant strides within the global circles. The concern about Africa is more in the negative perspective because Africa has showcased unwholesome tendencies such as leadership deficit, political crisis, corruption, religious antagonism, economic downturn and ethnic conflicts of various kinds to the rest of the world.

This scenario is aptly described thus: one can present a compendium of woes for a continent whose showcase to other parts of the world includes fratricidal civil wars, ethnic conflicts, political instability, corruption, famine, child labour, child prostitution, economic stagnation, and a constant decline in life expectancy. Although, as we have noted elsewhere, these problems are not peculiar to Africa, as there are so many crisis situations in other parts of the world, such as in Iraq, between Israelites and Palestinians, in former Yugoslavia, and in Northern Ireland to name a few. But the problem with Africa is that there is no mitigation of these problems in any meaningful sense, despite the increasing effort to resolve them (Oyeshile, 2007: 230).

However, one should be quick to note that the solution to Africa's problems lies more in the hands of the Africans themselves than in the hands of outsiders. Cletus Umezina echoes this line of thinking recently when he avers that "no other country outside the continent will be able to do it as effectively as the Africans themselves" (Umezina, 2014: 172). And as I have argued at various fora, we should move beyond how 'Europe underdeveloped Africa' to how 'Africans can develop Africa'.

### **On the Ethnicity, Culture, Society and Shifting Identities in Africa**

The discourse on ethnicity, culture, society and shifting identities becomes imperative when one considers the trajectory of Africa's development in the last 70 years, especially with developments after the political independence of most African states that were brought together by colonial incursion into Africa. For instance, many states that emerged after political independence were really motley of tribes and nationalities being forced together into one country. Immediately this occurred, there emerged a struggle for supremacy to control political power which forms the basis of other power configurations such as economic power. This scenario formed the basis of multi-ethnic states.

Let us note that in the period following World-war II, hasty decolonization created artificial multi-ethnic states when independence was granted to formal colonial territories without any attempt to tailor the new states in accordance with ethnic and cultural realities (Oyeshile, 2004: 292). The problem of shifting identities in the quest for who controls what and gets what directly led to changing relations even among ethnic nationalities that constitute a state. These states then were far from being a nation in the real sense of the term.

Furthermore because the new boundaries of the new African states merely reflected the borders of former colonial territories, few of today's African states represent homogenous ethnic or cultural entities. The result has been a legacy of widespread conflicts often amounting to civil wars, when smaller ethnic entities want to free themselves from domination by more powerful groups. Countries like Nigeria, Rwanda, Cote D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo and many other come to mind.

In coming to our conclusion, we factor in the need to pursue inclusive and integrative humanism that will facilitate cross cultural understanding drawing lessons from traditional African belief system. We also note that if we are to douse ethnic conflict, ethnocentrism and negative ethnic mentality in Africa, there must also be a concerted effort to avoid racist thinking between so-called super-altern and sub-altern nations of the world. Our guiding principle should be oneness of humanity. Our research is basically a qualitative appraisal of the problem of ethnicity and its effect in development. Recently, Muller, Mekgwe and Mhloyi (2013) have undertaken a seminal quantitative analysis of the problem of African development from perspectives such as ethnicity, demography and values.

### **Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in Africa**

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human existence. Heraclitus, Marx, Hegel and even various traditional accounts of man in the world have shown that we cannot do without conflict. It could be positive or negative de-

pending on the circumstance. But for growth to ensue there must be conflict of opposites. In this work however, attention shall be restricted to the kind of conflict that retards development and undermines all that support the being-in-the-world of man. Following Sartre, “existence precedes essence”, what then must we do with conflict such that it does not prevent man from existing? We do not speak of conflict or crisis merely in the abstract, conflicts, crises and turbulence are products of concrete human situations (Unah, 2000: 237). To further clarify the above position, Unah notes that: generally, conflicts do not occur in a Robison Crusoe situation. They occur fundamentally from social relatedness. Consequently, insofar as we are human beings living in a human society, conflicts cannot but occur (Unah, 2000: 237).

The statements above reveal a fundamental axiom about human existence – the inevitability of conflicts especially at the interpersonal level. Consequently, where diverse groups of people live, conflict is bound to be present. The fundamental issue then is how to manage such crises such that they do not degenerate thereby leading men back to the hypothetical Hobbesian state of nature in which life is ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’.

Man is a social being, he lives in a society. He possesses an array of values by which he orders his life. These values are seen in different perspectives by people he lives with, who have their own values and desires. Man’s attitudinal and behavioural rationality notwithstanding, his values at times obtrude with and obstruct the values of others, thereby leading to conflicts of various kinds. Some of the causes of these conflicts are greed, injustice, inordinate ambition, lack of consideration for others and selfishness.

Although conflict is inevitable in human organization due to differences in values and attitudes towards life that however does not mean that we should fold our arms and watch. In fact, this is not even possible because it can and does lead to destruction and state of underdevelopment of man and society. Paradoxically however, some philosophers such Heraclitus and Marx believe that conflict is necessary for the continued growth and flourishing of society. The kind of conflict we tackle in this paper is described by *Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary* thus: violent collision; a struggle on contest; a battle; a mental struggle; to be in opposition; to clash; incompatible; or irreconcilable” (1983: 264).

Given our description of conflict above, conflict can occur at various levels such as (1) Conflict between one individual and the other. This is known as interpersonal conflict. (2) Conflict between the community and the individual. This occurs in a situation where individual’s desires and goals are at variance with that of the society in which the individual finds himself. Sometimes too, the society’s stance may not promote the goods of the citizens, for example when there is a bad government. (3) Conflict can occur among groups in a country. For instance in a nation where there are incompatible ethnic nationalities as we have in Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan (Sudan and South Sudan) and many other African countries. (4) Conflict can occur between one country and the other as can be gleaned in international conflicts. The conflict between Iraq and Iran; between United States of America and Iraq; between Cameroun and Nigeria some decades ago are instances of conflict situation among nations. (5) The last level of conflict is intra-personal conflict. Sometimes, we may say that a man is at conflict with himself. This could be due to psychological trauma regarding decisions taken or unfulfilled ambition. In Yoruba culture, such a person is said to be in conflict with his *Ori* (The Personality god) (Oyeshile, 2007: 110-111). Suffice it to note that the third typology of conflict above is what interests us more. It should be noted however that this third type of conflict more often than not leads to other types of conflict or is intertwined with other types of conflict.

### **The Nature of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa**

Ethnicity is a form of social identity that helps in construction of social reality. Social identities, according to Owolabi, whether manifesting in class groupings, gender, or ethnic classifications, are potentials for conflict and violence. In fact, the phenomenon of social identity has been implicated in many of the social conflicts in the world today. Ethnicity, in particular, has been identified as playing a significant role in prevailing crisis of development facing most third world countries today (Owolabi, 2003:5). We should note, accordingly to John R. Searle, that collective consciousness and consensus can construct certain beliefs that can later become enduring and effective, so much that they could after a while be seen as natural (Owolabi, 2003:5; Searle, 1995).

Going by Otitie’s description, “ethnicity has the properties of common group consciousness and identity, and also group exclusiveness on the basis of which social discriminations are made. Hence, ethnicity ensures a consciousness of difference derived from objective and subjective elements as members of different socio-cultural groups interact in a plural society” (Otitie, 2000: 63). C. Young describes ethnicity “as the active sense of identification with some ethnic units” (Young, 1965: 234 & 1976).

The salient points that become obvious from our definition of ethnicity include common group identity, group exclusiveness, which accordingly leads to differentiation (Badru, 2010: 251) and differentiation if not properly managed leads to conflicts of various kinds. Ethnocentrism is then a dogmatic attachment to one’s group which raises the tendency in a person to despise other ethnic groups with the feeling that members of other ethnic groups are inferior, irrational, less intelligent and so forth. This tendency encourages some kind of epistemological, ethical and metaphysical absolutism which is prone to conflict. The basis of ethnic conflict then is a feeling of superiority of a dominant and or a dominating ethnic group over others.

Several works have been done recently on resolving ethnic conflict and providing avenues for development. Suberu for instance looks at the problem of ethnic minority in Nigeria (Suberu, 1996). Owolabi construed the problem as an imagined one (Owolabi, 2003) while Laleye (2011) examines the problem on the platform of democracy and conflict. Laleye's basic argument is that the different conflicts that have engulfed the Nigerian state whether religious, ethnic or class conflicts have a political undertone and he therefore calls for the re-enactment of the traditional past as an antidote to the spate of violent conflicts in Nigeria's democracy (Laleye, 2011; 129). In a similar vein, Cletus Umezina turns a critical searchlight on certain traditional values that shape governance even in the contemporary period and which have become inimical to good governance and development in Africa. For instance, the practice of occupying political positions for life which has been transferred to modern governance in most African states thereby resulting in sit-tight and sit-forever political leadership. This, to him, has been the basis of conflict in many multi-ethnic states in Africa. He recommends that this tendency should be abandoned because it constitutes an albatross to development and instead the value of dialogue which is prevalent in the cultural African life as well as the African mode of election in which the candidates for elective offices are known to the electorate ought to be emphasized (Umezina, 2014: 165).

In his seminal Inaugural Lecture, (2011) Innocent Asouzu calls for the abandonment of a philosophy of essence that construes the other as inferior and where contenders to issues, whether at the philosophical, religious, political, economic and even historical level, approach reality with a mindset that is polarized and bifurcated. According to him, "consistent commitment to a philosophy of essence as promoted by Aristotle enhances what I call "unintended ethnocentric commitment" both in inquiry and human interpersonal relationship" (Asouzu, 2011: 24). The net result of this unintended ethnocentric commitment has the capacity to complicate coexistence of peoples in a world of globalization.

Asouzu further relates this tendency to world politics, taking inspiration from Dallymayr Fred (2005) who is of the opinion that: aristotelian mentality being fostered by most Western powers as they seek to be in control of most things strategic, and most especially nuclear weapons, under the supposition that they alone have the higher rationality and needed self-control to use them properly. (Asouzu, 2011:27).

The above tendency by European powers to view other nations as 'the other' is a recipe for global and ethnic conflict. The phenomenon of the "other" has its ancestry in "Greeks" (supposedly) greater rationality and self-control as compared with the barbarians" (Asouzu, 2011; 27). Asouzu therefore recommends that we should drop this tendency of essentialism in human relations as well as the phenomenon of concealment (that which covers the eye or impairs vision) because they promote the tendency to construe human existence as a ceaseless struggle between irreconcilable opposites.

Politics of identity in multi-ethnic states leads to dysfunctional politics that encourages lopsidedness in the allocation of resources among ethnic groups by domineering and dominant political leadership especially in Africa. Hence the fierce competition to control political power leads to what I term 'poverty of power' – a situation in which power is not devolved to serve the interest of all stakeholders.

Let us note that ethnicity itself is as primordial as human evolution since people are born into specific cultures within certain political and geographical space. But why has this concept been used in such a way that it has become an albatross in our path to development, causing large scale conflicts that have resulted into the decimation of human lives and the dissipation of economic and other resources?

Two major factors have been adduced for ethnic conflicts in Africa. These are the control of political power and struggle over economic resources. The two are related in the sense that in multi-ethnic state, the group that controls the political power invariably controls economic resources, whether or not the resources are found within the region of the dominant unit. These problems of control of political power and lopsided distribution of economic resources subsequently lead to marginalization of some groups or outright cheating of other groups in the authoritative allocation of resources. This trend is noticeable in Liberia, Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan, Congo Rwanda and Burundi (see Nnoli, 1980; Ekeh, 1975; Summer, 1959).

The likelihood of conflicts in a multi-ethnic society where there is injustice in the allocation of resources and the sharing of political power is on the high side and this often leads to ethnocentrism, which is a tendency to projects one's own group as the centre of everything desirable while neglecting other groups. Such ethnocentrism often leads to deep-rooted prejudice on the part of the domineering and dominated groups.

Colonialism and its consequences have been taken as another major factor responsible for the present ethnic-crisis situation in most parts of Africa. It is an undeniable fact that colonialism brought into Africa new political and economic relationships. For instance, Freund correctly submitted that: colonialism largely destroyed the fundamental rhythm of pre-capitalist social and economic life without fully advancing a new self-sustained process of accumulation (Freund, 1998: 24).

The point here is that colonialism brought in capitalism in an explosive dimension thereby creating a new class of haves and have-nots especially through the extraction of wealth that went overseas. Coupled with the new political configuration which the colonialists put in place, the stage was set for rivalry and conflicts among the people

of the colonies. Sadly enough, the political parties that emerged after independence in most African states were autocratic and in no time most of the states became one-party states in the guise of protecting African communal kinship value system which to many of these new African states is averse to opposition. In this way, oppositions and labour forces that fought for independence were silenced or completely banned. For instance, this occurred in Ghana in 1961 and in Tanzania in 1964 (Freund, 1998: 214). From this trend Freund opined further that this background to African political economy brought two major developmental crises, namely; “the problematic relationship between the state and the mass of people and the deteriorating condition of the economy in the large majority of African countries” (Freund, 1998: 247).

These socio-economic inequalities, for instance, have been responsible for the conflicts between the Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda. These culminated into the 1994 genocide that took not less than 800, 000 lives. There is much tension with regard to which group controls political power since this is a sure avenue to enjoying certain privileges.

The post-colonial situation according to Ake (1996) has not fared better due to the fact that political independence only brought some changes in the composition of state managers while the lop-sidedness of the state character remained the same as it was under colonialism. This no doubt intensified the ethnic struggles within most African states. In fact, the state continued to be totalistic in scope, constituting a statist economy. It presented itself as an apparatus of violence with narrow social base. It also relied on coercion rather than authority for compliance (Ake, 1996: 3).

While many scholars are not under the illusion as to the obstructive nature of ethnicity in African socio-political dispensation, a few others have attempted to trivialize the potency of ethnicity by seeing it as a purely invented phenomenon and therefore a myth which has been perpetuated most by colonialism (See Benedict Anderson, 1983; Anthony Appiah, 1992 and Kolawole Owolabi, 2003).

According to Owolabi (2003: 6) if we accept the arguments of Anderson (1983) and Appiah (1992), and he thinks we should accept them, that identities are neither primordial nor natural but deliberately invented, then there is an urgent need for a deconstruction of ethnicity because of its overall negative effect in Africa. The forging of national identity is more desirable than the sustenance of fiction of ethnicity because, according to Owolabi (2003) the nation-state is the only form of legal and legitimate identity and also because it is the most effective structure that can ensure the desired development in Africa. It is on the basis of the above that we want to agree with Owolabi (2003: 21) that there is a need for national integration in order to avoid the evils of ethnicity and this integration can only be achieved if we resolve the problem of injustice, especially the problem of consistent marginalization of some groups within the polity. In fact: the legitimacy, survival and integration of a nation-state depends on how far the state as a legal institution can perform its primary role of distributing benefits and burdens among groups justifiably without any group feeling justifiably aggrieved (Owolabi 2003: 22).

### **Development in Africa**

There is no doubt then that the problem of ethnic cleavages has been a major obstacle to democracy, progress and development in Africa. But since it is difficult to reverse our ethnic alignments and configuration, we must try as much as possible to engender a sense of community based on the principle of common good and collective survival.

At the receiving end is the common man who is the recipient of all the by-products of antagonisms resulting from our socio-political configuration. Life indeed for the common man in Nigeria is becoming burdensome due to his inability to have the essential things of life. In this situation corruption has almost become a way of life. This is why the call for the restructuring of our body polity from the ethical and communal perspectives becomes imperative. According to Oladipo: what is required for the renewal of hope in Nigeria as a viable modern state is the establishment of an appropriate political framework for mutual cooperation among the various nationalities in the country (2000: 4).

Apart from this, there is the need to restructure our social institutions in such a way that they will be an effective vanguard in the promotion of civic values of tolerance, dialogue, understanding, compassion, justice, and equity (Oladipo, 2000: 4).

One of the key concepts in our title is development. Development has been subjected to a variety of meaning to imply, at least normatively, an improvement in the standard of living. Development theorists are divided about which development model Africa should adopt. Some have suggested the modernization theory, some the Marxist theory, others indigenous African value system and many others. We are not concerned directly with these controversies; our attempt is to emphasize the holistic development of the African continent, which has been made difficult by unending ethnic conflicts. Let us note that ethnic conflicts have ravaged most part of Africa and hardly can any part of Africa be exempted. The Arab spring which started on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2010 and which swept through Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Syria and other Arab nations sooner than later took ethnic dimension.

In spite of these conflicts, African leaders and states are still inundated with the quest for development. This then implies that we must look for that which is *permanent* in the midst of the perpetual flux being experienced

daily in Africa. That which is permanent form our estimation is development, which itself is subject to change. The type of development we have in mind is a multi-dimensional and holistic type that straddles the quantitative, moral, social, spiritual and economic. Many a time attempts have been concentrated on political and economic development to the exclusion of other forms of development. This to us cannot be a sustainable development. The recent attempt by the African Union (AU) on the New Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD) is also an attempt to engender a holistic development of the African continent but it is based mainly on economic and political landscapes (Ikuli, 2006). Africa needs development to ensure that she sustains the lives of her people and restore their hope of being joint stakeholders in the business of existence.

### **The Ontological, Ethical and Political Imperatives towards the Resolution of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa**

In this section, we outline our interventionist strategy at resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa. Let us note that it is not the case that the ontological, ethical and political aspects have not been considered by various theorists in the area of ethnicity, however, they have not considered the synergy or interconnectedness of the aspects in the resolution of ethnic conflicts in Africa. This gap is what I intend to fill by examining the ontological, ethical and political imperatives not from purely western perspective, but also from African cultural background.

Conflicts, it should be noted, starts from the human mind and then manifested in the physical. Before an act of violence is committed, conceptualization must have been done. That is why it is often claimed that 'wars starts from the mind of men', to also end it the human mind must also be given a prime of place.

Our ontological approach to ethnic conflict resolution is primarily based on the notion of inter-subjectivity. This notion is popularized by the existentialist philosophers who were saddled with the task of consensus in the face of two extremes viz objectivity (absolutism) and subjectivity. The African situation fits correctly into the existentialist framework for two related reasons. The first is that the individual and ethnic groups are self-centered, perhaps in the pursuit of a natural inclination to the law of self-preservation and a spurious authenticity. This factor is similar to the existentialist project of individuality and subjectivity in which the *cogito*, self, I, pour-soi or *Dasein* is given a prime of place in the world. The second reason is that individual and ethnic groups in Africa pursue their goals to the exclusion of the general welfare of others (Oyeshile, 2005).

The second factor is at variance with the ontological tenet of inter-subjectivity in the sense that there is an in-built regulator of human freedom which characterizes inter-subjectivity. In other words, when we pursue the concept of individual freedom to its logical conclusion, it would be discerned that it allows for the freedom of others in spite of impression to the contrary. This is found for example, in Sartre's statement that "when I choose for myself, I also choose for others" and in Heidegger's claim that: "Dasein is not only a being-in-the-world, he is also a being-with-others" (Unah, 1996: 60).

Our ontological affirmation on ethnic conflict resolution is also rooted in traditional African values. The Yoruba emphasize the concept of *Omoluabi* (a morally upright person). This concept is both ontological and moral. It is believed that this concept is the basis of (good) character (*iwa*) that sustains any community and plurality of communities. The social and political values of traditional Yoruba society are tailored towards the common good. These values include *isalejo* (hospitality), *iran ara enilowo* (mutual aid/caring for others), *ifowosowopo* (cooperation), *ifokantan* (mutual trust) and *aduroti/atilehin* (solidarity). All these are values that are germane in the sustenance of relationships in multi-ethnic states in Africa. The Yoruba believe that a person's destiny can be affected positively or negatively by his character. The import of this is that though the individual destiny (Ori/personality God) is personal, yet it needs the existence of others through character which is the basis for peaceful co-habitation to be successful.

Omoyajowo (1975) and Mbiti (1981) underscore the ontological and ethical basis of relationship which have far reaching implications for ethnic relationships in Africa. According to Omoyajowo, "to the African, the concept of man is meaningful only when seen as man in relation. A family is more than the western conception of just wife and children" (Omoyajowo, 1975: 41). And according to Mbiti "it is only in terms of other people does the individual becomes conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people" (Mbiti, 1981: 108).

Our ontological approach will further be appreciated when we pose the question: "How do individual and minority ethnic groups especially, survive in a multi-cultural society?" (Jamieson, 2004: 374). This question is important for many reasons, especially the growing complexity of modern societies in which only few people still live in a world that comprises only their own kind and their own set of cultural values and customs (Jamieson, 2004: 373). In other words, with increasing contact of various cultures and ethnic groups in particular nation-states, with diverse set of values, there are bound to be numerous antagonistic tendencies which often result in conflict. In this process too, not only will marginalized ethnic groups want to leave a nation-state in which it is been oppressed, it will also seek its own self-determination by bringing into prominence the issue of self-identity.

We should note then that the notion of community presupposes that we don't simply gloss-over those negative factors in our intergroup relations, but we also manage to resolve them such that they do not continue to lead to destructive frictions. As Kiros notes: "Human beings engaged in war are forgetful of the uncut-table human bonds, brotherhood and sisterhood, love and solidarity" (Kiros, 1987: 60). It is because of the need to sustain human

solidarity that we now attempt to provide some methods of managing ethnic conflicts and relations in multi-ethnic Africa that we draw some insights from the works of some existentialist philosophers.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) a German existentialist, through his seminal work *Being and Time* (Sein und Zeit) 1927, provides a veritable framework through which the *Dasein*, literally 'Being-there', which also encompasses the individuality of being, could achieve its project of authenticity by coping with certain facticities of life especially the being of others. Heidegger, although reemphasizes over and over again why the *Dasein* should be authentic nevertheless allows for the consideration of others in interpersonal relation which is also a basis for multi-ethnic harmony.

According to Jim Unah, a leading authority on Heidegger, "the *Dasein* is not only a being-in-the-world, he is also a being-with-others" (Unah, 1996: 60). The import of this is that not only is man constituted by his projects and his relations with the things which he makes use of, he is also related to others because, in the first instance, others are also being-in-the-world just in the same manner like himself. The implication of this for us, given our present ethnic predicament, is that, whether as an individual or a group saddled with particular projects and peculiar means of achieving them, we are related to others who are also beings-in-the-world. Heidegger underscores this point when he notes that when a man appears on the scene of existence, he is immediately not aware only of objects, but of other human beings as well. In other words, our existence is necessarily tied to the existence of others. Therefore in terms of survival, the individual must pursue his goals and projects such as will make possible the survival goal of others. One's existence also depends on recognition by others.

The interdependency of the *Dasein* with others is poignantly expressed thus: the awareness of the being of others is part of the awareness of our own being, and implied in it as the teacher implies the pupil, and the taxi-car implies both the driver and the passenger. We discover ourselves as existing with other people and our being as being with others (Unah, 1996: 60).

As *Daseins*, both at the individual and ethnic group levels, survival is only possible if and only if we recognize the importance of others not as mere objects standing in the way of achieving our goal of survival, but as ends in themselves who are not only important but also inevitable and inescapable in the realization of our goal of survival and freedom.

Buber's work *I and Thou* (1937) (*Ich und Du* (1923), which is the most popular of his works, provides another veritable basis for addressing conflicts that emanate from interpersonal and inter-ethnic relations. Living between 1878 and 1965, he applied his philosophical disquisition to bringing about understanding between Jews and Arabs and subsequently advocated a bi-national state (Rader, 1980: 348). As far as he was concerned there could be an alternative position to individualism and collectivism, and this he attempts to establish in the *I and Thou* through the elements of the inter-human.

The underlying assumption of the *I and Thou* of Buber is that one is a proper human being as one sees himself in relation with other human beings. Although most existentialist theories will aver that one consciousness tries to capture the consciousness of the other and make him an object, this kind of approach cannot rule out the reality of the inter-human (Buber, 1980: 351). The reason for this can be put thus: "The essential thing is not that one makes the other his object, but the fact that he is not fully able to do so" (Buber, 1980: 351). It is therefore only in partnership that my being can be perceived as an existing whole. This line of thinking is co-terminous with that of Heidegger's *Dasein*, Sartre's *Pour-soi* and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal field.

Buber's position is instructive here because it appropriately describes the nature of the relationship among ethnic groups in Africa – between the Hutus and Tutsi, the Ijaws, Itsekiri and Urhobo, Hausa and Igbo, Yoruba and Igbo, to mention a few instances in Africa. Granted then that we must embrace the I – thou relationship, what are the necessary ingredients for the attainment of this? According to Buber, at the sphere of the inter-human, the actual happenings between men must be wholly mutual or must be tending to grow towards mutual relations. This is because "the participation of both partners is in principle indispensable" (Buber, 1980: 351). This then reveals to us that the sphere of the inter-human is one in which a person is confronted by the other and its unfolding is referred to as the dialogical (Buber, 1980: 351).

There is thus a connection between Buber and Kant on interpersonal relationship. For Kant had expressed one of the essential principles in relationship that one's fellow must never at any time be thought of and treated merely as a means but rather as an independent end. According to Buber, the Kantian view is expressed as an 'ought' which is sustained by idea of human dignity.

We can thus see in Buber the need for us, irrespective of our ethnic affiliation, to break away from our narrow individualism to interpersonal fellowship. The elements of the inter-human spell out fundamental basis of the *I and Thou* relationship. It does stress that the completeness or wholeness of man is not in the sole virtue of relation to himself but it embodies the virtue of his relation to others. We see then such elements as mutuality, everyone as an end, interpersonal fellowship and dialogue – genuine dialogue – as those elements lacking or in short supply in inter-ethnic relations in most African states.

Let us note that in a situation of exploitation of some ethnic groups by others, marginalized groups have consistently agitated for national self-determination as recently witnessed in some African states. The attendant mar-

ginalization by the dominating group is often accompanied by large-scale corruption, injustice and wanton poverty and disease among the people. However, when the *I – Thou* relationship is used as the basis for co-existence among ethnic groups it would then be easy to address the problem of justice, equality, peace, security and development. The African Union (AU) and other African sub-regional bodies should actually see that all Africans are Africans qua Africans and should accept themselves not as means to satisfy their own ends, but as end in themselves.

The ethical imperative, as could be inferred from the foregoing analysis, implies that we should be moral in our dealing with others. Other ethnic groups should not be treated as just means to the satisfaction of our own ends but as kingdom of ends in themselves. Kant for instance puts forward the thesis of categorical imperative, with the injunction that we should act on the maxim through which we can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. It is on this basis that Kant urges us to treat others as ends and never as means to further our own interest (Azenabor, 2008: 58).

The Yoruba worldview, just like many other worldview, is replete with injunctions that stress the need for ethical considerations of others. For instance the concepts of *ajobi* (consanguinity) and *ajogbe* (co-residentship) emphasize what we share together both as blood relations and non-blood relations. The bottom line is that in Yoruba communal universe, the need for interdependence and co-existence guide social and political behavior.

When we talk about political imperative in the resolution of ethnic conflict in Africa, it has to be accompanied by legal provisions. In many multi-ethnic state the disequilibrium in the access to power and the inability by political leaders to use political power to promote overall interest of constituent ethnic groups have always brought about ethnic conflict. This also has much to do with leadership deficit. Hence, to resolve ethnic conflict, political power must be deployed appropriately to serve the interest of the people not ethnic group(s) that constitutes the power oligarchy.

On leadership, for instance, Kalu focusing attention on Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa notes: the central problem in Nigeria has been the lack of public leadership nurtured by the core values of an indigenous elite across the national landscape – political, civil society, cultural, religious, educational and in many instances, family. The absence of public leadership is directly related to the absence of national dialogue on what Nigerian identity should be about and how different nationalities that were brought together by colonialism should live together productively (Kalu, 2005: 3).

The above position by Kalu and others shows that conflict resolution in contemporary period has a critical political dimension. This is because contemporary society in its increasing complex form has to confront the problem of leadership, the problem of elite civil society, cultural, religious and educational structures. This tendency then calls for an astute political and legal structure to confront these issues. There is then the need to institutionalize democratic values on the political front. For instance, participation and sharing of power by ethnic groups in African countries, which is a major source of conflict, should not just end at the theoretical constitutional level, they must be seen to obtain in the actual operation of the government.

Conflict resolution within the political framework requires a legal framework, through constitutional entrenchment of certain rights. As a matter of fact, the legal framework in the context of conflict resolution lies mainly in the rule of law. It is through the rule of law that people's rights are protected and offenders are sanctioned with full backing of the government, civil society and the citizens. The foregoing, then, prompts up the kind of rights citizens are entitled to. There are three principal types of rights that a person may be said to have namely; civil rights, legal rights and human rights (Bodunrin, 1987:187).

Various government institutions and states have attempted to couch these rights in one form or the other. These include the United Nations Organization's declaration of Human Rights and The African Bill of Rights. For instance in 1981, an African charter on human and people's right was adopted and various states have constitutional provisions for rights of people. Specifically *Chapter IV section 34-36 of the 1999 Nigerian Federal Constitution* makes an adequate provision for fundamental human rights. We should note that the enhancement of these forms of rights (civil, legal and human) also demands from various individuals certain duties which may be in form of obligations such as payment of taxes, obeying the law, being loyal and respecting the right of others.

It is pathetic to note that in spite of the usefulness of the political and legal frame works in the resolution of conflicts and the entrenchment of various rights and laws in the constitutions in many African states, conflicts (violent ones for that matter) are still part of Africa's daily reality. The reasons are not far-fetched. In many African states there are flagrant injustice pertaining to people's right especially in the authoritative allocation of national resources, lopsidedness in power sharing, unlawful incarceration, arrest and extra judicial killings. Among other reasons are miscarriages of justice especially in our courts. In Nigeria for instance, there are allegations and counter-allegations of judicial bribery, which have sometimes led to dismissal or untimely retirement of judges.

In addition, policies are imposed on the citizens without due input and impulse of the citizens. It is our contention that if we are to have a conflict manageable Africa in which there will be sustainable development, the constitutional provisions should not only be seen to be made but should be strictly adhered to by governments who in one way or the other control and determine the life plan of their citizens.



Furthermore, a sense of tolerance and compromise is needed in Africa's volatile political space to resolve ethnic conflicts. But what kind of tolerance and compromise is needed in Africa? Certainly we do not mean tolerance and compromise in a debased sense in which there is passive complicity for all kinds of evil such as would undermine the developmental needs of the people. We are not talking about a sense of tolerance that encourages and justifies corruption. Rather, it is a sense of tolerance and compromise that encourages, among the various ethnic nationalities, a sense of 'give and take', a sense of dialogue, a sense of critical evaluation of ideas and policies and a sense of community.

### Conclusion

Our modest attempt in this paper is to propose the synergy of the ontological, ethical and political imperatives to resolve ethnic conflicts in Africa so as to pave way for sustainable development. We want to add that when ethnic conflicts are resolved, it gives room for peace and where there is peace, there would be development. Although, we can talk about negative peace (absence of physical violence) and positive peace (reconciliation and restoration through creative transformation of conflicts) (Albert & Oloyede, 2010: 2), it is positive peace that is most urgently needed in Africa. According to Albert and Oloyede, while negative peace is adversarial, based on force and involving a winner-takes-all, the positive non-adversarial conflict management strategies are premised on the readiness of parties involved to work together to find lasting solutions to their difference through negotiations, mediation and arbitration (Albert and Oloyede, 2010: 3).

Furthermore, people of the world should work towards security, peace and development as a collective project. In doing this, efforts should be made towards the achievement of inclusive and integrative humanism based on cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, ethnocentric and racist tendencies should be abolished, whether within or across cultures. The so-called super-altern nations must respect the humanity of the sub-altern nations. It is the positive attitude towards the 'other' that can help resolve the problem of ethnicity not only in Africa but across the continents of the world.

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