

Framing and Securitization in JOS Ethnic Conflicts

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a reality of social life and it exists at all levels of the society. It is evident in the individual level and cuts across other levels up to the global level. It has remained the truly constant phenomenon in all spheres of life. Intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts are equally important and are capable of far-reaching consequences. Despite the limited number of people involved in these forms of conflicts, the ripple effects of conflicts enable them to seep into other spectra thereby becoming cataclysmic. As such, conflict at any level should not be underestimated or handled with kid gloves. The carnage and intensity of protracted intragroup or intergroup conflicts are usually higher when compared with intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. The number of people involved in a conflict may be a direct or indirect influence on the course of the conflict. Diverse opinions and frames are formed by members of the conflicting parties. Thus, 'the more the people, the more the frames' becomes applicable, though not as an exact representation but of expectation in any conflict.

Kesterner and Ray (2002) see conflict as a social factual situation in which at least two parties (individuals, groups, states) are involved and strive for goals which can only be reached by one party, and or want to employ incompatible means to achieve a

certain goal. It thus implies struggle or competition over values by opposing entities. The Jos conflicts have been conflicts of interests and values before they took ethnic dimension. Over time, the Jos conflicts have occurred mainly because of incompatibility exhibited by the ethnic groups therein. Though the conflicts have pitted one ethnic group against another, the causes have however varied from social to political, religious and economic issues (Adeleye, 2017). Wolff (2006) defines the term conflict "as a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just, goals." He further argues that sometimes, conflict is as a result of the struggle for power and material gains by leaders and followers alike. Because of such vested interests, the conflict entrepreneurs and hawkers prefer conflict to cooperation and privilege violence over negotiations. To have a thorough grasp of a conflict therefore, one must cautiously examine the various actors and factors and their interrelationship in the conflict situation. Wolff's opinion is apt because there are some actors who would prefer conflict because of the benefits that will accrue to them. This sect of people he referred to as conflict entrepreneurs. Such people would include business moguls whose companies major in weapon manufacture, public

relations officers, media personnel and government who gain from peacekeeping missions.

To Joshua and Jegede (2013), conflict is coterminous with violence but may not necessarily mean the same. Accordingly, conflict may or may not be occasioned with destruction of lives and properties. Conflict that is destructive is termed violent conflict. However, if dispute, quarrel or misunderstanding between people or groups is not occasioned with threat or actual destruction of lives and properties, it is nonviolent conflict. This is in line with Galtung (2002), who traces the origin of violence as – contradictions among incompatible goals leading to polarization which manifests in prejudice and discrimination thereby leading to violence. The ethnic conflicts in Jos have both been violent and destructive. Spanning over a decade, the Hausa/Fulani group and the indigenous Berom, Afizere and Anaguta group have taken up arms against each other. From the onset of the conflicts, the numerous confrontations have led to huge loss of lives and properties.

FRAMING AND SECURITIZATION

The major and most important premise for framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for a wide range of values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an existing one. Framing involves social construction of a phenomenon by mass media, political and social leaders, or other actors and organizations. It is an inevitable process of selective influence over an individual's or group of individuals'

perception of the meanings attributed to actions, words, phrases or events. It occurs in one of two ways: as frames in thought, which is made up of the mental projections, interpretations, and simplifications of reality; and frames in communication, consisting of the communication of frames between different speech actors.

Application of framing theory in communication may be regarded as positive or negative – depending on the audience and the type of information being presented. In essence, framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (the frame) influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are tools used to structure the meaning of a message. They influence the perception of the news by the audience. As developed by Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (Snow et al, 1986), framing theory provides a framework to better understand social movements and collective behaviour. It explains how movement leaders and speech actors define events and conditions in a manner that will warrant mass mobilization for or against a perceived gain or threat respectively. The theory holds that how an issue or an event is presented has an influence on people's actions, decisions and reactions. Thus, the way and manner in which an event is framed can rouse public outcry against it even when the event is devoid of any harm. Goffman (1974) opines that in the society, both bystanders and participants in an event form conjectures as to what occurred before, and expectations of what is likely to happen. This can be seen as the development of primary frameworks where individual understanding and perception of speeches, actions and events

vary, and may not in actual fact present the true picture.

Securitization theory is a 20th century development of the Copenhagen School. The aim of securitization theory sticks to the core of existential threats, survival and referent objects (Wæver, 1995). The term “Securitization” was coined by Ole Wæver; it means a process through which a particular discourse transforms certain entities into a threat. The entities from which threats can be constructed include environmental, political, societal or human security issues. Securitization theory argues that security and insecurity are not necessarily objective practices but can be constructed in relation to the existential threat (Febrica, 2010). This process primarily entails speech act with emphasis on existential threat by the elites. Securitization involves three components namely: the securitization actor that makes the move, this is usually an elite who serves as the speech actor; a valued referent object that is being threatened and needs protection; an audience which is the target of the act being put forward to persuade and convince them to accept the issue as a security threat. In actual fact, securitization is a task beyond the purview of all units and subunits, it becomes possible only with reliance on power, ability and capability and the means to socially, economically or politically construct a threat (Taureck, 2006).

Securitization is the identification of an existential threat to a valued referent object and the call for exceptional measures. Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998) have it that, to securitize an issue is to demand mobilisation of maximum efforts and justify the use of extraordinary measures to handle

the threat(s). Securitization theory is oftentimes referred to as an advanced form of framing theory. This is due to the presence of speech act and the roles of the speech actors. Securitization is a theory commonly used in international relations. It has however been used to explain conflicts since the term ‘existential threats’ does not exclusively refer to militaries and ‘referent objects’ may transcend states (Wæver, 1996). This has established three distinct spectra on which securitization can exist. They are micro, subsystem and system (macro) spectra. The size of the targeted audience and the universality of referent object increases from micro spectrum to macro spectrum.

According to Balamir-Coşkun (2012), social groups such as ethnic groups and religious groups are also recognised by the Copenhagen School to be “equally important as distinctive referent objects of security”. Societal insecurity occurs when communities perceive a development or potentiality as a threat in identity terms or to the survival of their communities (Buzan et al, 1998). In the application of securitization theory to intergroup conflict, a group must have perceived a threat to a value which may be religious, political, economic or cultural and mobilise maximum efforts to wade off or exterminate the threat. The Copenhagen School in the course of developing securitization theory did not explicitly design it for the subsystem (state) orientation (Charrett, 2009).

The application of the theory on both micro and system spectra has not in any way diminished its relevance and importance in the subsystem spectrum. This application has not been considered as a flaw but it has not been successful in comparison with its

application on subsystem spectrum. According to Balamir-Coşkun (2012), the analysis of securitization theory is hinged on questions of “when and under what conditions who securitizes what issue”. While these seem clearly well-defined on the subsystem spectrum, they are not so defined on the other spectrums. Though the Copenhagen School argues that “no one is excluded from attempts to articulate alternative interpretations of security,” but as a result of the power structures within the field of security, certain actors, typically state elites, hold an advantaged position over defining security threats (Buzan et al, 1998). The task of transforming an issue into a threat requires a move from normal to emergency politics. This can easily be fitted into the subsystem spectrum (state) but does not enjoy such ease elsewhere as the other spectrums do not wield enough control over their populace to enforce absolute compliance. While the social groups are not sovereign and may not be able to establish wider security legitimacy to legitimately adopt extraordinary measures in combating the existential threat, the audience in the system spectrum remains too subtle and indirect to facilitate the level of mass identity necessary for securitization (Buzan, & Wæver, 2009).

FRAMING AND SECURITIZATION IN JOS

In a heterogeneous society, the manner of framing the activities of any of the groupings may breed conflict within such society whether or not these activities pose any threat or challenge to the others. Framing theory is most useful in understanding ethnic hostilities in heterogeneous settlements. Nearly all heterogeneous settlements in Nigeria have

the indigene/settler issue to deal with. Acquisition of landed properties, economic and political power by settlers are often framed as usurpation of the rights of the indigenes while the quest to solely control the affairs of the town or city by the indigenes is framed as an abuse of the rights of the settlers. Given the divide that exists among the various residents of Nigeria, activities of each group or its members are usually framed as detrimental to other group(s) whether or not there is danger in such activities. Numerous conflicts have ensued in Nigeria owing to misrepresentation and distortion of facts as a result of Framing. Conflicts in Jos are the result of the perception and interpretation of activities of hostile groups by authoritative voices in the society.

Howe (2016) argues that “inflammatory language serves as both a catalyst and justification for episodes of inter-communal violence”. Inter-group conflicts in Jos, as with other towns and cities in Nigeria do not usually start with outright declaration of war on one group by the other. In most cases, during disputes, cleavages are employed as instruments to garner support for individuals or groups when they are from different blocks. Having polarised the populace along these divides, actions and inactions of each group are framed as calamitous to the well-being of the other with the aid of speech act. Stone (2009) succinctly harmonises the challenge and effect of microsecuritization – “it is also important to stress that the notion of ‘societal security’ is difficult to apply since it deals with identities and cultures – essentially subjective and contextual constructions – it can easily lead to politics of discrimination and exclusion”.

With each group converging to protect its members and values, securitization of foreigner is birthed. Subsequently, each ethnic group mobilises maximum efforts and extraordinary measures to combat the existential threat which happens to be the other ethnic group. This has been fuelled by the suspicion existing across the ethnic groups over each group's intention to dominate the other. While this remains a valid cause in the conflicts, it is often discarded in the course of the conflicts and has not played any significant role in reconciling the conflicting groups. On the other hand, religion and religious differences have been closely knitted with the immediate causes of the conflicts. Religious differences have played vital roles in the Jos conflicts because the conflicting parties profess different creed, the Hausa/Fulani are Muslims while the indigenous Berom, Anaguta and Afizere are Christians (Ojukwu & Onifade, 2010).

This divide has really strengthened the conflicts and at other times, the conflicts have been used to prosecute religious intolerance. It is a usual happening in Jos conflict for churches and mosques to be destroyed. They have been pursued rigorously in the course of the conflicts and have served as rallying points in bringing the conflicts to an end. As established in the course of this study, religion has played active roles in the conflicts and peace processes in Jos. At a time, the pulpits were made to become a tool for escalating the conflicts because of the grievances or pain the people felt. Some of the religious leaders allowed their biased minds to take control. Now, from honest discussion and dialogue, they play positive roles and they talk to their members to embrace peace.

CONCLUSION

The conflicts in Jos have had far-reaching effects on virtually all spheres of life. The conflicts have led to huge loss of human resources which could have been put to better use in the development of the economy. The conflicts have claimed thousands of lives and displaced many more. The input of those killed would be felt in the economy, the gap of those who fled the city also, and the burden of those that were displaced will be on the economy while they could not engage in any economic activities. Intergroup relations in Jos have become strained. Suspicion has become the order of the day leading to accusations and counteraccusations across board. This hostility between the groups was made manifest when each group accused the other of burning the Jos central market. Insecurity has resulted from the conflicts as "well-armed militants loosely organised along religious lines" have increased (International Crisis Group, 2012). As a result of these conflicts, Jos has witnessed terrorist activities by Jama'atu ahlus-Sunnah Liddaawati wal Jihad group under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau in the bid "to start avenging the atrocities against Muslims", and has expressed commitment to continue attacking "disbelievers and their allies" who are fighting Muslims (Imam and Adinoyi, 2010). The conflicts took this turn as a result of the mechanisms introduced into it. The escalation of the conflicts can not be discussed without the roles played by the speech actors and the numerous frames formed from actions of the opposing group.

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