

CONFLICT AS CULTURE AND THE ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA'S PERSISTENT VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The study of conflict is as old as humanity, but while conflict naturally arises from competition over resources, power and identity, it has never been an inherent part of any culture. In recent times, however, conflict in North-Central Nigeria has moved beyond isolated disputes to become a persistent and defining feature of social life. This transformation - what this study refers to as *confliculture* - raises ethical concerns as violence becomes normalised, eroding moral values and perpetuating a cycle of hostility that undermines social progress. This study argues that the culture of conflict has far-reaching consequences, disrupting economic stability, weakening political governance and undermining social cohesion. It also impairs gender inequalities, distorts religious practices and affects moral and psychological well-being. In addition, historical grievances, ethno-religious divisions, political manipulation and economic disparities have reinforced a culture of conflict, leading to human rights abuses, weakened governance, food insecurity and intergenerational trauma. The study concludes that breaking this cycle requires an ethical reorientation, inclusive governance and community-led peace-building. By prioritising dialogue and cooperation, North-Central Nigeria can move from a culture of violence to one of stability and progress, fostering sustainable development. The research uses critical analysis and philosophical inquiry to explore the deep-rooted causes and consequences of the culture of conflict.

Keywords: Ethical implications, violence, Conflict culture, North-Central, Nigerian peoples

Introduction

Nigeria has experienced conflict throughout its history, but the nature and intensity of these conflicts have evolved significantly over time. While violence has always been a part of the country's historical trajectory, its causes and manifestations have changed over time. Pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria witnessed conflicts driven by territorial expansion, trade disputes and resistance to foreign rule. In contrast, post-colonial Nigeria has faced more complex and persistent forms of violence that have transformed the country's conflict landscape. Unlike earlier conflicts, which were largely localised and episodic, contemporary violence is more systemic, deeply rooted in political, economic and social structures.

Since the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the country has been plagued by recurrent violence manifested in ethnic tensions, religious fundamentalism, hegemonic struggles, electoral violence, political thuggery and governance failures. Other sources of conflict include ethno-religious clashes, politics of character assassination, chieftaincy disputes, corruption, elite incitement, youth mobilisation for civil unrest, debates over power rotation, resource allocation and control, ethnic marginalisation, citizenship disputes between indigenous and non-indigenous people, militia formation, militancy, terrorism and various social vices.¹

Nowhere is this transformation more evident than in North-Central Nigeria, a region that has become the focus of some of the country's most intractable conflicts. Until recently, the region now known as North-Central Nigeria was commonly referred to as the Middle Belt or Central Nigeria, the terms being used interchangeably. However, for political reasons, the term 'North-Central Nigeria' was strategically introduced. The addition of 'North' to 'Central' reflects a deliberate linguistic and political manoeuvre aimed at extending the influence of the Hausa-Fulani political elite. This reclassification was not just a nominal adjustment, but a calculated move to redefine the power dynamics within the country's geopolitical framework. By redefining the region's identity, northern elites sought to consolidate geopolitical advantages by asserting greater political and territorial claims over the Middle Belt. This shift in regional identity has had profound consequences, aggravating historical grievances and exacerbating inter-group tensions. This rebranding, coupled with the region's deep-seated ethnic diversity, heightened ethnocentrism and religious plurality, has contributed to the persistent and recurrent conflicts in North-Central Nigeria.

Given the ongoing nature of these conflicts, a key question arises: Has violence in the region

¹. OgohAlubo, *Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crises in the Central Region* (Lagos: Eddy Asae Press, 2006); S. O. Alozieuwa, "The Ombatse Crisis in Nigeria: Background, Recent Developments, and Possible Solutions," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Conflict Science* 2, no. 2 (2016), <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/jics/vol2/iss2/1>.; O. S. Robert and E. N. Besong, *Religious Hypocrisy and Fanaticism: The Apex Problem of a Religious Nation* (Germany: Grin Publishers, 2017).

become more than a temporary disruption? Has it become embedded in the fabric of society? In response to these concerns, this paper examines the extent to which conflict has become a cultural phenomenon among the peoples of the region. It critically analyses the ethical implications of this development, considering how persistent violence affects social cohesion, governance and moral responsibility. Understanding the culturalisation of conflict requires an examination of both its historical development and its ethical implications. The study addresses key questions such as what is the nature of conflict in North-Central Nigeria? At what point does conflict become entrenched as a cultural practice? What are the ethical implications of this emerging culture of conflict? What historical factors have contributed to its prevalence? By addressing these questions, the paper aims not only to describe the reality of conflict in the region, but also to provide a framework for ethical reflection and conflict transformation. Through this analysis, the paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the moral, historical and structural dimensions of conflict in the region.

An Explication of Culture and Conflict Culture

Culture is defined differently by different scholars, but all definitions share the common idea that it encompasses the totality of a people's way of life, both material and non-material.² Despite differences in interpretation, most definitions converge on the idea that culture shapes human behaviour, social norms and institutions. Because these definitions converge on a common understanding, we will take two as representative. Ozumba³ defines culture as the totality of a people's way of life, perception of life, and formalisation of values, which includes the way people dance, entertain strangers, eat, dress, and the language they speak, as well as attitudes and dispositions that help them adapt to their environment. For this study, this definition implies that the peoples of North-Central Nigeria (NCN) have adapted to conflict to such an extent that it has become ingrained in their cultural fabric. The definition also highlights how these peoples perceive conflict and how it has been formalised as part of their socio-political interactions. While culture encompasses other values, our focus here is on how conflict has been normalised, either consciously or unconsciously, within the region's cultural system.

Similarly, Allimini defines culture as "continuous, enduring, and relating the past to the present and the present to the future in an all-encompassing way."⁴ He argues that culture defines the

^{2.} G. O. Ozumba, *A Course Text on Ethics*, 2nd impression (Lagos: OnosomegbowhoOgbinaka Publishers Ltd., 2004), 130; N. Anyaegbunam, "The Media and Cultural Orientation," in *Culture and the Media in Nigeria*, ed. J. B. Yusuff (Abuja: National Institute for Cultural Orientation, 2005), 27; T. Allimi, "Cultural Journalism in Nigeria," in *Culture and the Media in Nigeria*, ed. J. B. Yusuff (Abuja: National Institute for Cultural Orientation, 2005), 52; M. Ekwierhoma, "Nigeria: A Flourishing Culture in Diversity" (paper presented at the 2007 World Culture Day Celebrations for the National Institute for Cultural Orientation, Abuja, 2007), 4-7.

^{3.} Ozumba, *A Course Text on Ethics*, 130

^{4.} T. Allimi, "Cultural Journalism in Nigeria, 52

identity, ethos, and values of a society and includes habits, beliefs, customs, attitudes, and laws. This perspective is consistent with our analysis in that it highlights how culture shapes societal norms, including ethical and moral dimensions. This perspective deepens our understanding of how cultural norms are transmitted across generations, influencing both individual behaviour and collective identity. The study of conflict within this framework falls within the realm of ethics and its complementary disciplines, such as law, morality, religion, sociology, and history. These disciplines provide insights into how societies develop over time, including the transformation of conflict from an episodic event to an embedded cultural practice.

Robert explains that history both reflects and is shaped by these disciplines, providing a basis for reconstructing social change.⁵ In this respect, historical narratives play a crucial role in reinforcing or challenging social norms, including those related to violence and conflict. Given this understanding, we argue that conflict has been culturalised—it has become an accepted, albeit destructive, part of the non-material culture of the NCN peoples. This argument is based on the idea that culture "defines the identity of a society, its ethos and values." In this sense, conflict has become an identifying feature of the NCN, infiltrating and even reshaping the region's values and social order of the region.

Culture, as used in this context, encompasses both positive and negative enduring acts and activities common to a given people. It is dynamic yet enduring, material and immaterial, concrete and abstract, diachronic and synchronic. As a product of human interaction, culture evolves through continuous negotiation between traditions and new realities. From an ethical perspective, culture can be understood as the sum of the conventionally correct and accepted ways of life of a people. Some cultural elements are unique to particular societies, while others are universal. The ethical aspects of culture - rooted in moral or natural law - are preserved and passed on from one generation to the next, while unethical aspects, such as conflict, are discouraged. However, when a society normalises violence as a means of social organisation, conflict ceases to be a mere disruption and becomes a defining cultural feature. In the case of the NCN, however, conflict has not only persisted but has become unconsciously woven into the cultural fabric of the region.

Conflict culture (hereafter *confliculture*) refers to a deeply entrenched pattern of violence and unrest, including wars, riots, massacres, political struggles and other destructive acts that disrupt peace, security and societal progress. When conflict becomes a recurrent and defining feature of a people's way of life, it is transformed from an external disturbance into an internalised cultural norm. At this point, violence is no longer perceived as an exception but as an integral part of social

⁵. O.S. Robert, "Appraising a Historian's Literary Contribution to Social Order: A Focus on Okpeh, OchayiOchayi," *International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 12 (July 2016): 2-3.

life. The material aspects of *confliculture* include weapons and instruments of violence, while the non-material aspects include the beliefs, narratives and justifications that sustain violent interactions.

Before conflict attains the status of culture, it must go through a process we call *confliculturalisation*. This process involves the gradual acceptance and integration of conflict into everyday life, often without conscious recognition. In this paper we define *confliculturalisation* as the process by which conflict becomes an accepted social norm, consciously or unconsciously embedded in a people's way of life. In other words, it marks the transition from conflict as an isolated occurrence to conflict as a defining element of collective identity. Culturalisation in this sense refers to the transformation of an external phenomenon into an internal, defining characteristic of a culture. Acculturation, on the other hand, refers to the borrowing of cultural elements from one group to another. For example, certain aspects of Western or Indian culture have been incorporated into Hausa culture over time. However, when an originally external characteristic - such as persistent violent conflict - becomes internalised, the process is one of culturalisation rather than mere acculturation.

Fukuyama's work on culture and institutional development provides valuable insights into this phenomenon. He highlights a similar process in economic sociology, where deeply rooted cultural norms shape institutional efficiency. He notes that corruption and governance failures are often culturally perpetuated, as public officials operate within established norms of patronage and favouritism rather than formal legal frameworks.⁶ This reflects how conflict has become self-reinforcing in the NCN; just as economic actors in corrupt systems expect bribery to be the norm, individuals in the NCN have come to see violent responses as the default mechanism for resolving disputes. Fukuyama's work suggests that breaking such cycles requires not only institutional reforms, but also a cultural shift that redefines acceptable behaviour within society.⁷ This insight strengthens the argument that *confliculture* in NCN is not just a security issue, but a deeply embedded social phenomenon that requires a structural redefinition of norms.

It is well known that cultures are created, maintained and sometimes destroyed by human action. *Confliculturalisation* occurs in societies where conflict is prolonged and eventually becomes ingrained in the social fabric. This has been the case in North-Central Nigeria, where repeated violent encounters have made conflict the norm rather than the exception. As a result, the peoples of the region have become predisposed to conflict at the slightest provocation. Over time, they have unconsciously internalised conflict, making it a predictable response to disputes. What was

⁶. F. Fukuyama, "Culture and Economic Development." *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2001): 3133.

⁷. Ibid. p. 3134.

once an aberration has now become an expectation, perpetuating cycles of hostility across generations. This ingrained mindset has significant ethical implications, as it perpetuates cycles of violence and undermines efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence.

The term 'ethical implications' here refers to the moral consequences of both individual acts of conflict and the wider culture of violence that has emerged. From an ethical perspective, conflict arises from unethical acts and produces further unethical consequences. However, the persistence of *confliculture* raises a critical question: If conflict is merely the result of unethical behaviour, why have some societies successfully minimised it while others remain trapped in its cycle? Although conflict may be driven by instinct or external circumstances, the fact that not all societies or individuals engage in perpetual violence suggests that it is avoidable. This paper therefore considers conflict and *confliculture* as ethically problematic phenomena that should be critically examined. The consequences of *confliculture* go beyond immediate violence, affecting governance, economic stability, social institutions and inter-group relations.

Fukuyama further argues that culture significantly influences economic development by shaping social values and norms that regulate trade, investment and institutional efficiency.⁸ Culture is not just a background variable but an active determinant of how societies organise production, govern themselves and manage economic resources.⁹ In societies where conflict is deeply embedded in culture, economic growth is stifled by the erosion of trust and the destruction of social capital. Fukuyama's analysis suggests that societies with high levels of social capital - shared norms of cooperation and mutual obligation - tend to develop stable economies and strong institutions, while those where conflict is endemic struggle with inefficiency and instability.¹⁰

This perspective is particularly relevant to NCN, where repeated cycles of violence have undermined trust and economic cooperation. Social capital, which Fukuyama describes as the foundation of functioning institutions, has been weakened by prolonged conflict, making it difficult for communities to engage in long-term economic planning.¹¹ As a result, instability is not just a consequence of conflict but a reinforcing mechanism that ensures its persistence. When conflict becomes institutionalised, as it has in NCN, it not only disrupts immediate economic activity but also creates a cultural framework in which instability is expected and even normalised. This reduces incentives for investment, weakens state institutions and perpetuates a cycle of underdevelopment.

^{8.} Ibid. p. 3130.

^{9.} Ibid. p. 3131.

^{10.} Ibid. p. 3132.

^{11.} Ibid. p. 3133.

Against this background, the evolving culture of conflict among the peoples of North-Central Nigeria has profound implications for regional stability, economic development, social cohesion and the ethical framework that governs interpersonal and intergroup relations. Understanding these implications is key to addressing the root causes of *confliculture*, and the following sections will explore them in more detail.

Some Philosophical Perspectives on Conflict in Culture Context

Current trends in world conflict culture seem to support Huntington's contention that the resurgence of religion and culture in world politics would be a major source of conflict in the post-Cold War era.¹² He argues that as civilisations interact more frequently, their differences - especially in religious and cultural values - become sources of tension rather than integration. He observes that interaction and mixing exacerbate differences over the rights of members of one civilisation in a country dominated by another. This pattern is evident in the continuing tensions between the peoples of North Central Nigeria (NCN). Huntington specifically identifies the proximate causes of the clashes between the West and the Islamic world in the late twentieth century, which extend beyond the West to other parts of the globe, including Africa.

A key factor, he says, is the explosive growth of the Muslim population, which has created large numbers of unemployed and disaffected young people who become recruits for Islamist causes, exert pressure on neighbouring societies and migrate to the West and elsewhere. This demographic pressure, combined with limited economic opportunities, creates frustration that can be exploited by extremist ideologies. Second, the Islamic resurgence has given Muslims renewed confidence in their civilisation and values, sharpening the contrast with Western ideals. Third, the West's simultaneous efforts to universalise its values, maintain its military and economic superiority, and intervene in conflicts in the Muslim world are generating intense resentment among Muslims. Fourth, the collapse of communism has removed a common enemy for the West and Islam, leading each to perceive the other as the greatest threat. Finally, increased interaction between Muslims and Westerners reinforces a heightened sense of identity and difference. These factors accentuate the religious conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in the NCN.

In addition, Huntington stresses that both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic, exclusive in their belief systems, and divide the world into believers and non-believers. Each religion claims a universal mission to convert all non-believers.¹³ This missionary imperative fuels competition and conflict between followers of the two faiths, leading to persistent religious tensions.¹⁴ This

^{12.} S. P. Huntington, 'The clash of civilization?' *Foreign Affairs*, vol.72, no. 3. (1993); S. P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of World order*. (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks) (1996), 211.

^{13.} Ibid. p. 210

^{14.} O. S. Robert and E. N. Besong, *Religious Hypocrisy and Fanaticism*

perspective helps to explain why religious divisions in the NCN are not merely political, but deeply rooted in cultural and ideological worldviews.

While Huntington attributes conflict to cultural and religious differences, Karl Marx offers a contrasting perspective - one that sees religion as a tool shaped by socio-economic conditions rather than a primary cause of conflict. Marx criticises the role of religion in society, famously stating that religion is the opium of the masses, the mark of the oppressed creature, and a result of socio-economic conditions.¹⁵ He suggests that religion serves as a coping mechanism for existential struggles, reinforcing rather than solving societal problems. His argument implies that religious conflicts persist because of deep-seated social and economic inequalities. However, this perspective does not take into account the ethical and moral imperatives within religions that are fundamentally opposed to violence and conflict. The misuse of religion by adherents has led to distortions that prioritise cultural identity over ethical principles, thereby exacerbating global religious tensions, including those in the NCN.

Building on Marx's argument, Francis Fukuyama suggests that the triumph of liberal democracy and the consequent equal recognition of all human beings would reduce religion to a secondary role in world affairs.¹⁶ Unlike Marx, Fukuyama does not explicitly advocate for revolution but envisions a gradual transformation in which liberal democracy promotes inclusiveness and reduces religious conflict. However, the NCN has yet to experience such a transformation, as neither Marx's revolution nor Fukuyama's liberal democratic ideals have been fully realised. Bolarinwa's analysis reinforces this point by showing that rather than diminishing in importance, religion continues to be used as a political tool, particularly in regions such as NCN.

Bolarinwa notes that "more than ever before, individuals, groups, and even states are using religion to achieve socio-economic and political goals."¹⁷ This trend is particularly evident in the NCN, where religious affiliation is often manipulated for political gain. As Bolarinwa observes, elites incite religious tensions, mobilise followers against others and promote conflict.¹⁸ The instrumentalisation of religion has led to the rise of religious militias, particularly in northern Nigeria, although the NCN has not experienced violence on the scale of the north-east.

^{15.} Stephen Chijioko Nwinya, "Rationalizing Muslims' Propensity to Violent Conflicts: Towards Peaceful Coexistence in Multi-Religious Society," in *Philosophy, Security and the Challenge of Development in Africa: Issues, Problems and Prospects*, eds. Alloy S. Ohuah, Anthony Idachaba, and Mark Imoter Shenge (Eagle Prints Nigeria, 2019), 106.

^{16.} F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 229.

^{17.} Joshua Olusegun Bolariwa, "Clash of Cultures: Muslim-Christian Violence in Nigeria and Its Implications for Political Stability," in *Trends and Tensions in Managing Conflict*, eds. Isaac Olawale Albert and Olaniyi Nurudeen Olarinde (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd., 2010), 64.

^{18.} Ibid.

Nwinya¹⁹ highlights the inherent aggression of humanity, which serves as a defence mechanism but also predisposes individuals to conflict. Although humans are rational, they are also driven by emotions and feelings. This duality means that, despite possessing reason, humans often revert to primal instincts, thus exacerbating conflict. The unchecked expression of this aggression in the NCN calls for urgent scientific and political intervention. This perspective is in line with Hobbes' argument in *Leviathan* that, in the absence of a strong political authority, conflict is inevitable due to basic human tendencies towards competition, mistrust, and the pursuit of dominance. Pärtel Piirimäe, in his analysis of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, argues that Hobbes provides a systematic explanation of why conflict is inevitable in the absence of a strong political authority. Hobbes claims that the state of nature is a state of war, where life is characterised by fear and insecurity. Piirimäe points out that Hobbes identifies three main causes of conflict: competition, suspicion (mutual distrust), and the pursuit of glory.²⁰

First, competition arises because individuals have an insatiable desire for power. Hobbes argues that power is necessary to secure future goods, and because resources are limited, people inevitably compete.²¹ This drive for power leads individuals to seek dominance over others, making conflict inevitable. Secondly, timidity forces individuals to act preemptively to protect themselves. Hobbes notes that even the weakest individual has the means to kill the strongest through alliances or deception.²² This creates a situation where individuals, fearing attack from others, choose to strike first as a rational strategy for survival. Piirimäe stresses that this mechanism creates a cycle of insecurity as everyone anticipates aggression from others, reinforcing a state of war. Thirdly, the search for glory is a major cause of conflict, as individuals seek to establish their reputation and refuse to be underestimated. According to Piirimäe, Hobbes argues that individuals fight not only for material gain but also for honour and status.²³ The desire for recognition leads to violence, as people are willing to fight rather than accept humiliation. Piirimäe also clarifies that Hobbes distinguishes between those who seek honour for practical reasons - such as deterring future attacks - and those who are vainly aggressive and enjoy conquest for its own sake.²⁴

Ultimately, Piirimäe concludes that Hobbes presents a compelling argument for the need for an absolute sovereign. Without a central authority to enforce agreements, individuals will resort to aggression out of fear and competition. The only way to escape the state of nature, according to

19. Stephen Chijioke Nwinya, "Rationalizing Muslims' Propensity to Violent Conflicts. 108.

20. P. Piirimäe, "The Explanation of Conflict in Hobbes's *Leviathan*." *TRAMES* 10, no. 1 (2006): 5.

21. Ibid. p. 6

22. Ibid. p. 6

23. Ibid. p. 7

24. Ibid. p. 8

Hobbes, is to establish a powerful state that removes the uncertainty that fuels conflict.²⁵ However, modern conflict resolution theory suggests that alternative governance structures - such as inclusive political institutions, the rule of law and power-sharing arrangements - can prevent perpetual conflict without the need for an all-powerful sovereign. This brings us to a broader philosophical question: Is history itself characterised by conflict? Kant and Hegel offer perspectives that go beyond governance, exploring conflict as a fundamental driver of human development.

Kant sees history as the unfolding of a natural plan for the refinement of human reason and moral capacity. He argues that a philosopher of history must discern an overarching natural purpose in human action, even when individuals do not consciously follow a rational plan.²⁶ This suggests the need for a critical re-evaluation of historical narratives to remove distortions that fuel conflict. Historians and ethicists must work together to counter historical misrepresentations that perpetuate violence and division. Similarly, Hegel sees humanity as engaged in a dialectical struggle for self-realisation. He asserts that world history is the progressive self-consciousness of the World Spirit, shaped by the clash of conflicting forces.²⁷ He argues that freedom is the essence of Spirit and is developed through conflict. War and upheaval, though destructive, are necessary for historical progress. Figures such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great, according to Hegel, were merely instruments of the World Spirit to achieve historical transformation.²⁸

Hegel identifies three historical moments in the development of freedom: the Oriental world (where only one is free), the Greek and Roman world (where some are free), and the German world (where all are free).²⁹ He claims that conflict drives history towards the realisation of freedom. However, this perspective runs the risk of justifying violence as an inevitable aspect of progress. In response, Nwinya³⁰ argues that true freedom can only be achieved through the refinement of human consciousness, which requires the transcendence of materialistic entanglements that generate violence. This suggests that philosophical inquiry should focus on developing ethical frameworks that prioritise peace, recognising historical conflicts as lessons rather than necessities.

^{25.} Ibid., p. 15

^{26.} Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963).

^{27.} G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 46, ed. R.M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1982), 160.

^{28.} Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 7 (New York: Image Books, 1994), 218.

^{29.} G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 169.

^{30.} Stephen Chijioke Nwinya, "Rationalizing Muslims' Propensity to Violent Conflicts. 109.

Ethical Implications of Conflict Culture among the People of North-Central Nigeria

Although no human society is free from conflict, its nature, magnitude and frequency vary. Conflicts in North-Central Nigeria (NCN) are distinctly different from those in other geopolitical zones in terms of their intensity, persistence and recurrence. This is not to say that conflicts unique to other zones do not occur in the NCN and vice versa. However, the emphasis here is that the spate of recurrent conflicts in the NCN is alarmingly disproportionate compared to other regions. This paper therefore argues that conflict is embedded in the cultural fabric of North-Central Nigeria and forms a core aspect of its non-material culture.

Surprisingly, the recurrent violent conflicts in NCN have neither changed nor diminished significantly over time. Instead, they have escalated and become more frequent. So why has violence remained so persistent in the region? At first sight, two main factors are responsible for this: geography and ethno-linguistic diversity, and religious pluralism. These are compounded by historical factors, including marginalisation, elite manipulation, the instrumentalisation of youth in conflict and the enduring legacy of violence in the region. Rather than being temporary catalysts, these elements have entrenched a culture of violence that continues to shape inter-group relations in the region. In support of this assertion, Alozieuwa states:

Despite claims of peaceful and harmonious co-existence among the ethnic groups in Nasarawa state, relations among the ethno-linguistic groups in the North-Central region have recently been characterized by perennial communal and sectarian strife, especially the Plateau-Nasarawa-Benue-Kogi axis - fostered both by hegemonic and resistance politics.³¹

While the NCN is notable for the persistence of its conflicts, it is important to recognise that violence is not unique to the region. Entrenched patterns of violent conflict exist in virtually all of Nigeria's geopolitical zones. The oil-producing Niger Delta region in the South-South is plagued by disputes over resource control and environmental conflicts. The Southwest experiences ethnic and communal violence, often driven by youth groups. The North faces ethno-religious conflicts and land disputes, while the South-East struggles with social fragmentation, political instability, and secessionist movements.³² At the national level, the politicisation of ethnic and religious identities exacerbates political violence. More broadly, Nigeria's history of conflict is rooted in resource competition, systemic injustice, inequality, and governance failures.³³

^{31.} S. O. Alozieuwa, "The Ombatse Crisis in Nigeria, 5.

^{32.} L. Reyhler, *Initial Conflict Impact Assessment, EU Micro Project Programme, Bayelsa Delta and River States* (Unpublished report for EU, 2002); I.O. Albert, "New Dimensions in the Management of Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Insights from Activities of AAPW," in *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolutions and Transformation*, eds. O. Otite and I.O. Albert (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999).

^{33.} L. Reyhler, *Initial Conflict Impact Assessment*,

It is both ethically and morally arguable that conflict is problematic because of its devastating effects on individuals, groups and nations. It undermines human dignity, violates moral principles and disrupts social cohesion. As Chinua Achebe aptly puts it, we are all victims of civil war.³⁴ The recurrent conflicts in the NCN illustrate this reality, as they disproportionately affect innocent citizens. Beyond the immediate physical destruction, conflict leaves lasting scars on the moral and social fabric of communities. The prolonged state of violence distorts social norms and weakens the ethical fabric of society. Violent manifestations include ethno-religious clashes, communal disputes, riots, bombings, sporadic shootings and targeted killings by herdsmen, bandits, political thugs and unemployed youths.

When conflict becomes a cultural norm (*confliculture*), it takes on a new and more dangerous dimension. It becomes intergenerational, pervasive and embedded in the social consciousness. This is where the ethical dilemma deepens - violence is no longer seen as an anomaly but as a legitimate means of resolving disputes. This normalisation transforms violence from a reactive measure into an accepted way of life, shaping how individuals and groups engage in conflict. Over time, individuals become desensitised to violence, reinforcing a cycle of hostility and retaliation. The socialisation process perpetuates this trend, making it self-perpetuating. In essence, conflict is no longer just an event but a defining feature of the region's identity. The ethical and cultural foundations of NCN communities are increasingly undermined by the culture of conflict, which fosters a disturbing level of adaptation to violence. Residents of Jos, for example, are often described as unfazed by scenes of conflict and bomb blasts, in contrast to communities that have historically maintained peace through effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms.

By its very nature, conflict involves the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others, leading to human rights violations, dehumanisation, lawlessness and deepening social divisions. As these divisions deepen, the possibility of meaningful reconciliation diminishes. It exacerbates existing problems, distorts worldviews and destroys cultural identity. As communities become trapped in cycles of revenge and retaliation, they lose the ability to engage in constructive dialogue, further deepening mistrust. The ethical implications of conflict can be broadly categorised into economic and social dimensions, including political, epistemic (educational) and socio-cultural aspects.

Economically, the culture of conflict in the NCN has far-reaching consequences. It disrupts and destroys agricultural activities, displacing farmers, causing food shortages, and exacerbating the global food crisis. Recurrent attacks on farmers by herdsmen, terrorists, and bandits have led to a

³⁴. Chinua Achebe, "Civil Peace," in *Girls at War and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1972)

decline in agricultural productivity, loss of life, and serious health complications for survivors.³⁵ In addition to these immediate consequences, the conflict is fundamentally altering the economic landscape of the region, discouraging investment and long-term development. As Polachek³⁶ notes, violent conflict cripples trade and investment, while trade has the potential to reduce conflict between nations. More broadly, protracted conflict in the NCN has intensified unemployment, increased social vices, and deepened economic deprivation. Agricultural productivity plummets, businesses collapse, and forced migration becomes a last resort for many seeking safety. The resulting economic instability not only impoverishes communities but also fuels further violence, as desperation and lack of opportunity push more people into toward violent activities.

One of the most pressing but often overlooked effects of conflict in the NCN is its impact on food security. Widespread displacement of farmers due to violent attacks has led to a decline in food production, contributing to rising levels of hunger and malnutrition. Without stable conditions for farming, food shortages will continue to worsen, pushing communities into deeper crises. Insecurity prevents farmers from planting and harvesting crops, leading to significant gaps in food supplies. Rural communities that rely heavily on subsistence farming are particularly affected, as their ability to plant and harvest crops is constantly disrupted.

Conflict also discourages long-term investment in agriculture, as insecurity prevents farmers from expanding their operations or adopting improved farming techniques. The destruction of farmland, coupled with the inability to access markets due to insecurity, has a knock-on effect on food availability. In the long term, this situation threatens not only regional stability but also national food security, given the critical role of the NCN in Nigeria's agricultural production.

The ethical dimensions of the crisis are profound. When conflict leads to widespread hunger, it violates fundamental human rights, including the right to food and the right to a dignified life. Children, pregnant women and the elderly are particularly vulnerable and suffer most from food shortages and malnutrition. Food insecurity further fuels displacement, forcing many to leave their ancestral homes in search of food and exacerbating the refugee crisis in Nigeria. The ethical failure lies not only in the act of violence itself, but in the long-term consequences of depriving entire communities of their means of survival.

Beyond the economic impact, conflict has a profound effect on social life. Social interactions, including community gatherings, educational and cultural activities, are disrupted. As fear

³⁵. Besong, E.N., & Robert, O.S., 'Philosophical consideration of herdsmen menace and hunger in contemporary Nigeria', *American Journal of Service Science and Management*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2019)

³⁶. S. Polacheck, "How Trade Affects International Interactions," *Economics of Peace and Security Journal* 2 (2007).

becomes a daily reality, public spaces lose their function as places of community life. In conflict-prone areas, freedom of expression is curtailed for fear of violent reprisals. For example, NYSC corps members in the North are often warned not to engage in religious debates to avoid violent attacks. This climate of fear stifles meaningful discourse and social cohesion. During periods of intense conflict, public life grinds to a halt. Schools, markets, religious centres and recreational spaces become inaccessible. This disruption has serious epistemic consequences, hampering education and increasing dropout rates. Many IDPs find it difficult to return to school or engage in productive activities, leading to long-term social stagnation.

More critically, conflicts in the NCN create new social problems and exacerbate existing ones. Issues such as hunger, psychological trauma, aggression, frustration and crime all have ethical dimensions. The intergenerational impact of conflict ensures that younger generations grow up in a reality where violence is seen as an inevitable aspect of life, making peace-building efforts even more challenging. Given its destructive effects, the culturalisation or acculturation of conflict is ethically indefensible.

The culture of conflict in North-Central Nigeria has far-reaching ethical, economic and social implications. The normalisation of violence not only undermines human dignity, but also cripples economic development, destabilises social structures and erodes moral values. Without sustainable solutions, the region risks sliding further into a protracted humanitarian crisis. Addressing this crisis requires conflict resolution strategies, peace-building initiatives and ethical reorientation to dismantle the *confliculture* and restore societal stability. Without urgent action, the consequences of the conflict will continue to devastate both human lives and the overall sustainability of the region.

Conclusion

While conflict is a universal aspect of human societies, its persistence and recurrence in NCN has transformed it into a deeply embedded cultural pattern - what this study refers to as *confliculture*. Unlike isolated disputes that arise and dissipate, *confliculture* has become an enduring aspect of social life, shaping inter-group relations, governance, morality, and economic stability. This phenomenon not only weakens institutional frameworks but also distorts ethical values and foster a climate in which violence is perceived as an acceptable means of resolving disputes. Societies are not condemned to perpetual conflict. Human beings, as rational and moral agents, have the capacity to transcend cycles of violence through ethical reflection and deliberate action. The ethical imperative therefore demands a conscious rejection of the culture of conflict and a shift towards justice, dialogue and reconciliation. This transition requires ethical reorientation, inclusive governance and community-led peace-building efforts that prioritise coexistence over division. Ultimately, moving away from *confliculture* is not just a political or economic

imperative, but a moral obligation. By promoting peace, unity, tolerance and inclusion, North-Central Nigeria can replace a culture of violence with one of stability and progress. Only through this fundamental transformation can the region build a society based on ethical coexistence and sustainable development.

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