Chapter 5

Nkuho Institution and Marital Conflict Prevention Among the Efik People

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ABSTRACT

The marriage institution with its complexity is not exempted from conflict. In the world where emphasis is on conflict resolution, the Efik people speak of marital conflict prevention more than conflict resolution and management. Marital conflict if not prevented or resolved can become inimical to both present and future generation apart from its fire engulfing the entire community. Though female circumcision (which is associated with Nkuho) has been abolished, it is the opinion of this chapter that the educational spirit behind this institution is still a veritable tool in preventing marital conflict. The chapter made use of ethno-methodological approach with content analysis to aver that in preventing marital conflict among Efik people, Nkuho institution can be a veritable tool of conflict prevention and peace building. This work has shown that Nkuho institution has something positive to offer to the modern world, especially as it concerns marital conflict prevention.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an intrinsic and global element of human society, from the union of two individuals, things or people linked as a pair to the largest group of the human society. Conflict transcends human society to all living beings and communities – even among plants and animal societies. D. A. Offiong (1997) rightly avers that, “there is no human group or society in which life moves along in harmony at all times and that, individuals do not always do what society expects them to do, and they frequently behave in ways that disrupt the social order” (p. 423). Conflict affects all strata of life and are classified specifically into four types – interpersonal conflict, a conflict between two individuals; intrapersonal conflict, a conflict occurs within an individual’s mind. This is a type of conflict that is “psychological, involving the individual’s thoughts, values, principles and emotions” (Akpabio, 2018, p. 19). Others are, intra-group

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conflict which occurs among individuals within the same team and inter-group conflict which occurs when there is a misunderstanding among different teams outside an organization. Generally, conflicts are caused by incompatibilities and misunderstandings among those involved.

Life is full of conflict – it can be biological, which happens within oneself and results in sickness, economical which may result in financial bankruptcy, socially which may result in the society being dismembered, religiously and morally which may lead to sin and breakdown of law and order, politically leading to war among tribes or nations. Conflict pervades all facets of life or even ecological which may result in natural disaster. Conflicts begins from conception and “from birth, a baby begins the journey of conflict, which is a flash of conflict” (Akpabio, 2018, p. 1). As a baby grows up, he/she bites with his/her teeth, scratches with his/her nails and do other of such things when the baby is upset. This shows that conflict continues even to human old age and death.

Worthy of note is the fact that, conflict is as old as humankind’s existence. In the Jewish Torah which is part of the Christian Old Testament, after the creation of Adam and Eve, conflict came in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) and this was followed by family conflict between two brothers – Cain and Abel (Gen.4:1-15). In his discourse on Power and Ideology in International Politics, H. J. Mogenthau (1948) posits that in time of conflict, where humans do not possess arms (whether physical or intellectual) to fight, they can resolve to use their bare fists (p. 27). Conflict is a salient issue in all institutions of life.

Every society is aware of the repercussions of unresolved conflicts, hence, humans depending on their groups have developed informal and formals ways on how to resolve conflicts, especially human societal conflicts. This has led to what is normally called conflict resolution. Conflict resolution, which may also be called reconciliation, is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. Ultimately, there are various ways of addressing conflict and this include but not limited to the following: negotiation, mediation, arbitration, diplomacy, and creative peace-building. Furthermore, the concept of conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of nonviolent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution.

Africans are not exempted from conflict and “this generally exist whenever or wherever incompatible events occurred and may result in win-lose character” (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014, p. 139). Africans have particular ways of conceptualizing conflict. Traditional definitions of conflict regard it as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Just as other communities have their specials way of resolving conflicts, so are the Efik people. This ranges from the use of Ekpe cult, arbitration by the elders – either at the family level or clan level to appearing before the titular king and his cabinet (Obong-in-council with the clan heads called Eiubom). Another avenue used is iban isong. This is “a society of women who band themselves together in defence of female honour against any who uses an indecent language on the sacredness of womanhood, or on a fellow woman” (Aye, 1991, p. 46). Other ways to resolve conflict among the Efik people include using the religious institutions such as divination, involvement of ancestors (mbukpo), mbiam, swearing an oath before a deity, etc.

There is no gainsaying over-stressing the fact that one major institution where conflict often rages its head is in marital union, in particular and family circles in general. The sociological composition of family life makes conflict almost an everyday affair. Marriage conflict among Efik people can be between husband and wife, between co-wives (since Efik has a polygamous culture), conflict within extended families and also conflict between extended families (Offiong, 1997). Such conflicts have the ability to dismembered the social stratification and leave many wounded socially, morally, emotionally, financially and otherwise.