TITLE OF RESEARCH PAPER ANALYSIS OF THE ROHINGYA CONFLICT USING THE SPITCEROW MODEL

ALHAGIE O CAMARA

First Author, Second Author, Third Author ……

Author Details (optional)
Alhagie O Camara is currently a lecturer at the university of the Gambia under the school of business and Public administration . E-mail: aocamara@utg.edu.gm

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to conduct an analysis the Rohingya conflict of Myanmar using Christopher Mitchell's Spitcerow model of conflict analysis. The model is a framework that asks basic questions about the conflict in order to understand the conflict dynamics such as who the parties, what the main issues are, forms of behaviour, what changes, outcomes, and how and in what manner the conflict has broaden. In conducting this analysis, an attempt shall be made to reflect on some or all of the core theories on conflict such as **Basic human Needs, Realistic theory**, **Social identity** and generally, **theories of ethnic conflict** as they relate to the Rohingya conflict. An attempt shall during this reflection, seek to ascertain whether the root causes of this particular conflict are due to structural violence, human needs, or other theoretical explanations.

Introduction

This paper seeks to conduct an analysis the Rohingya conflict of Myanmar using Christopher Mitchell's Spitcerow model of conflict analysis. The model is a framework that asks basic questions about the conflict in order to understand the conflict dynamics such as who the parties, what the main issues are, forms of behaviour, what changes, outcomes, and how and in what manner the conflict has broaden. In short, it model seeks to establish the **S**ources, **P**arties, **I**ssues, **T**actics, **C**hanges, **E**nlargement, **R**oles, **O**utcome, **W**inners (as in the acronym **SPITCEROW).**

In conducting this analysis, an attempt shall be made to reflect on some or all of the core theories on conflict such as **Basic human Needs, Realistic theory**, **Social identity** and generally, **theories of ethnic conflict** as they relate to the Rohingya conflict. An attempt shall during this reflection, seek to ascertain whether the root causes of this particular conflict are due to structural violence, human needs, or other theoretical explanations.

Sources of the Rohingya conflict?

While there was ethnic diversity before WW II, the question of identity had never cropped up, until after this war as the different groups co-existed amicably. Rahman, 2015 in support of this contention argues that the Rohingya conflict had not been this severe until after the WW II when Myanmarr got its indepence in1948. This begs the question: why now the question of identity? The author attributed the roots or origin of the conflict to British colonialism of divide and rule. In support of this contention, (Zaw, 2014) notes that migration flows of Muslims from Bangladesh to the Rakhine state of Burma occurred under British rule; and with these creating resentments and hence, ethnic, social, and economic problem ensued culminating in the conflict as it is today.

Thus, much of this conflict had its roots in British colonialism. During the period between 1942-1945 i.e. WW II precisely), (Zaw, 2014; Wasserberger, 2017) noted that, Britain with aid from the Muslim Rohingyas and other minorities repelled invading Japanese who were aided by majority Buddhist Burmans (Wasserberger, 2017). The former ascribed the affiliations of the majority Burmans to the Japanese because of these resentments and (W.Z.Initiatives, October 2015) succinctly describes the resentments Burmans felt in this excerpt below:

"Burmans felt as though their country was completely in the hands of outsiders--politically, culturally, and economically."

Parties to this conflict and how they originally come into existence

The Rohingya conflict actors are best understood in the context of the conflict itself. In a table, (Durand, 2013, p. 28) outlined the context of the Rohingya conflict as one of two. On the one hand, **ethno-political factors** shroud the conflict while ethno-societal factors marked the same conflict, on the other hand.

Taking cue from (Durand, 2013, p. 28), Myanmar government, the Rohingyas, and armed ethnic groups constitute the primary conflict actors in the case of the ethno-political context factor (Zaw, 2014, p. 3); with many of the latter actors according to (W.Z.Initiatives, October 2015) report having signed a peace agreement with the government. Similarly, Durand still offers a glimpse of the actors in case of the ethno-societal conflict contextual factors, which squarely falls on the Rohingyas and the Buddhist ethnic groups.

However, while primary actors do exist in every conflict, so too are secondary or even tertiary actors and, Rohingya conflict is no exception. Secondary actors are those that (Durand, 2013) notes are involved less obviously in the different subsystems of the conflict whereas the tertiary actors constitute the mediators or observers that facilitate for positive change between the contending parties. These tertiary players constitute according to (ibid) the international community, the media, and refugee-hosting states such as Bangladesh and other neighbouring states. In the case of ethno-political contextual factors of the Rohingya conflict, the actors are according to Durand comprised of "affected populations, states, and organizations providing weapons and militias" or one form of support or another (Durand, 2013, p. 28). By the same token, the author notes that the actors in the case of the ethno-societal Rohingyan conflict are likewise those affected inhabitants, government institutions (for example, the Burmese military)and Buddhist religious institutions (ibid).

A lack of recognition of ethnic groups on the part of the Burmese government (Sohel, 2017; Durand, 2013) notes is the original underlying reason for the existence of the conflict. As (Durand, 2013)argues sixty per cent of the Burmese population is constituted by Burman minorities who feel they are not being given sufficient rights and access to power. Citing Beech ,2013, the author notes that military regimes since the independence from the British were responsible for the oppressive and discriminatory practices against the Burmese minority group more so the Rohingyans.

Main issues in the conflict [both overt and any "hidden agendas" and how have they changed during the course of the conflict

Sohel and Durand notes that a lack of recognition of ethnic groups on the part of the Burmese government is the original underlying reason for the existence of the conflict (Sohel, 2017; Durand, 2013). As Durand argues,

Burman minorities who feel they are not being given sufficient rights and access to power constitute sixty per cent of the Burmese population. Citing Beech, 2013, the author notes that the military regimes that ruled since independence were responsible for the oppressive and discriminatory practices against the Burmese minority group more so the Rohingyans.

This author highlights the main issues in terms of the interests, needs and the issues relating to the Rohingya conflict. The main issue for the Rohingyas fall under two categories namely persecution from the Burmese government forces and Buddhist ethnicities. While for the Rohingyas, citizenship, equal rights and getting back their lands are the **interest** they want protected, the Burmese government is interested in gaining both economic and political power, national unity and peace and international recognition. The **needs** too, differ in that, while the **Burmese government's needs** is to ensure assertiveness in protecting its interest, the **Rohingya needs** are essentially security in terms of freedom from fear, the need to ensure survival of their identity as a distinct group with distinct culture and religion (ibid).

However, while these may be the main issues in the Rohingya conflict, there seems to be more to it than meets the eye. Citing Rachel Blomquest (Sohel, 2017) argue that ethno-demographic grievances define the conflict between Buddhist and Rohingya-Muslim populations in the Rakhine State of Myanmar making references to Buddhist leaders, who according to Sohel intimated the Rohingya population's rapid growth and high fertility rates threaten to overtake local Buddhist populations. While demography may well contribute to explaining, the hidden agenda of this conflict, (Wasserberger, 2017) and (W.Z.Initiatives, October 2015) are of the view that it is more a question of the origin of the Rohingya ethnicity. The question of demography is important in explaining the issue of the question of origin given Sohel's intimation of the rapid growth and high fertility rate of the Rohingyas overtaking their Buddhist neighbours. This expressed fear of and apprehension could support explanations of the religious nature the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar and by extension the very question of identity.

Forms of behaviour or tactics adversaries employed against one another

The Myanmar conflict (Durand, 2013) contends follows a retaliatory conflict spiral model wherein each party responds to the opponents' immediate or past behaviour. Competition as (Zaw, 2014) notes characterized the conflict style of both parties as they reciprocate attacks, burning, killings and physical violence. Forms of conflict behaviour are to large extent, determined by power-conflict dynamics (Coleman, 2006, p. 133).

Major changes in the conflict over time; and important thresholds crossed

Two Acts infringed upon the rights of the Rohingya and these include according to (W.Z.Initiatives, October 2015, p. 7) **the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act and the 1982 Burmese Citizenship Law.** While it took years for this conflict to emerge, the actual identity politics, the report notes took full root in 1982 when the Rohingya by law, were stripped of their citizenship.

Using the simple conflict escalation and de-escalation model offered by Oliver Ramsbotham & etal, 2005, the important threshold crossed in the Myanmar conflict are what the author's called the *"initial difference", "original contradictions",* and the *"polarization"* (Oliver Ramsbotham & etal, 2005). The initial difference constitute the social developments while the latter two contradictions and polarization imply the opposing interest of the groups and the formation of antagonistic parties that manifest their contradictions behaviourally through '*violence'* as another threshold among their escalation and de-escalation model.

How and in what manner the conflict enlarge

Quoting Inquiry Commission (2013), (Zaw, 2014) notes that the triggering event the rape and murder case of a Buddhist Rakhine woman triggered the first phase of communal violence followed by revenge attacks, negative stereotypes fear and misperception escalating into anti-Muslims campaigns nationwide. The enlargement of the Rohingya conflict has largely come about because of unfulfilled grievances. Sohel, in support of this contention argues that due to this unanswered complaints sympathetic Buddhist compatriots and monks have capitalised on the situation through national propaganda of anti-Muslim rhetoric (Sohel, 2017). The vocalization of grievances, combined with the lobbying power of nationalistic groups, places pressure on the Myanmar government to address this perceived demographic problem (ibid).

In a report (W.Z.Initiatives, October 2015, p. 3; Zöllner, 2017, p. 23) maintains that the government played a significant role in the oppression of the Rohingya by ingraining disdain into its citizens, for the Rohingya in order to rally support in the November 2015 elections.

Roles played by other parties in the conflict [allies, patrons, intermediaries, relevant audiences] and its impact on the course of the conflict?

As (Zöllner, 2017, p. 34) reports, UN agencies were the only global agents involved in humanitarian assistance in the self-isolated country before the popular unrest of 1988 and democracy movement. According to the author, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was the first International Non-Government Organisation (INGO) that started to work in Myanmar in 1992.

At the regional and international level, (Durand, 2013) note that the reactions are mixed. While the international community expressed humanitarian concerns, the EU is said to have lifted its economic sanctions against Myanmar. Similarly, ASEAN in November 2012 is also said to have announced its non- interventionist policy especially the Rohingya citizenship (ibid).

Given this background, the conflict remains as it were because as Durand notes "neither the international community nor the region will be major drivers of change in Myanmar, unless their economic interests are seriously threatened" (Durand, 2013).

Eventual outcome of the conflict?

Durand, 2013, p. 4, argues that up to the present, neither the international community nor internal actors have been able to provide a suitable way towards long-term and sustainable peace for Myanmar Rohingya issue. (Zöllner, 2017, p. 4), in support of this contends that in January 2015, representatives of several international agencies and 17 South-East Asian countries that were reluctant to offer them asylum to the 'boat people' trying to escape from the border region of Myanmar and Bangladesh to discuss the plight of these refugees.

Emerged winners (if any), and in what manner, does it make sense to talk of "winners" and "losers"?

Since conflict, according to Boulding (1962) as cited in (Bell, 2018) is a form of competitive behavior between two different parties over perceived or actual incompatible goals or limited resources, competition can, as (Deutsch, 2006, p. 30) notes vary from a continuum of destructiveness to constructiveness. At the destructive end, conflict the author notes, can be unfair, unregulated competition; whereas fair, regulated competition can be the mid-point in the continuum. At the extreme end is constructive competition, which is positive (ibid).

In any, destructive conflict (such as the Rohingyas), where asymmetrical power relations exist, zero-sum is bound to take form in terms of destruction one disputant is able to inflict on the other (ibid). In this case, we can talk about possible winners and losers, and the Myanmar-Rohingya Muslim conflict appears to be characteristic of a zero-sum destructive conflict. However, it does not make sense to talk of winners and losers because as (Oliver Ramsbotham & etal, 2005, p. 21) points out unfair, asymmetric puts cost on both sides of the conflict. Supposed winners need to sustain their purported upper status in the conflict.

Theoretical explanation of the Rohingya conflict

Conflict is, according to (2016; Bell, 2018) is perceived divergence of interest defined in terms of peoples' feeling about what is desirable which most often are translated into aspirations and goals. In order words, conflict arises when two or more parties tend to have incompatible interest, aspirations, and goals. A number of theories exist that explain how **conflict occurs**; and generally, the **process of conflict**. These theories include among others, Basic Human Needs, Realistic Conflict Theory, and Social Identity Theory. The Myanmar conflict (Durand, 2013) contends follows a retaliatory conflict spiral model wherein each party responds to the opponents' immediate or past behaviour.

Basic Human Needs

Human needs theorists argue that one of the primary causes of protracted or intractable conflict is people's unyielding drive to meet their unmet needs on the individual, group, and societal level. **Of these needs,** (Bell, 2018; Roy, 1990, p. 130) **outlined the importance of Safety/Security, belongingness, Self-esteem, personal fulfillment, identity given the linkage between the satisfaction of needs and social harmony. Roy citing**

Burton contends that the frustration of needs produce disturbing consequences for the harmonious functioning of social institutions (Roy, 1990, p. 127)**.** The Rohingya issue contends follows an exclusion prototype of conflict (Durand, 2013) wherein the identity, religion of the Rohingyas is questioned.

Burton and other human needs theorists as cited in (Bell, 2018) **define identity as a sense of self in relation to the outside world which can become problematic for society when that identity is not recognized as legitimate or considered inferior or threatened by others with different identifications.** Related to identity is **cultural security** which according to (Bell, 2018) implies **the need for recognition of one's language, traditions, religion,** cultural values, ideas, and concepts. This is very much the case of the Rohingya conflict as it is marked by structural violence as embodied the denial of citizenship and access to resources, direct (murder) and cultural violence (attitudes sought to justify our interest).

Johan Galtung as cited in (Oliver Ramsbotham & etal, 2005, p. 5) sees conflict as a dynamic processs the components of which are constantly changing and, suggested that conflict be viewed as a triangle, with contradictions(C) and attitude (A) and behaviour (B) at its vertices. The model embraces that conflicts are symmetrical or asymmetrical. Underlying conflict situation refers to the contradictions that includes perceived or actual incompatible goal between parties which Mitchell (1981) as cited in (ibid) contends are engendered by mis-matches between social values and social structure. He argues that all three components-contradictions, attitudes, and behaviour Galtung notes together present a full conflict intimating that a conflict structure without conflictual attitudes or behaviour is latent or structural. **Structural violence** – a term that (Bell, 2018) refers as "a **form of violence** where social structures and institution harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.**"** The Rohingya needs, which are deprived from them as outlined in previous sections attest to these mis-matches and hence structural violence, are the underlying causes.

While basic needs theory offers a better explanation the underlying issues of the Rohingya Muslim-Myanmar conflict, realistic theory explains the intergroup hostility between the parties which arises as a result of conflicting goals and competition over limited resources.

Ethnic theoretical explanation of the Rohingya conflict

Three Theories explain ethnic conflict and they include the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist. While all three theories have something to explain the Myanmar the primordialist better explains this conflict. While the primordialist argue that ethnic identity comes at birth and ties us as human beings with deep natural human connections to the race, religion, language or location we belong (Williams, 2015, p. 147). Citing (Geertz, 1973:250, Chandra, 2012 ,Hirschman, 2009, Weir, 2012 etal), the author notes that ethnic differences are perceived as ancestral, deep and irreconcilable and as such ethnic conflict stems naturally and inevitably from 'ancient hatreds' between ethnic groups . The theory is useful in explaining the emotive dimension of ethnic conflicts (ibid) as it offers intuition into ethnically motivated behaviours. The author notes that ethnicity is

powerful in arousing obligation and hence passion for violent conflicts if misused, as in the case of the Myanmar-Rohingya conflict.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Rohingya- Myanmar conflict using Mitchell's SPITCEROW model tacitly implies that the conflict is complex indeed. Primordialism influenced by the different narratives of the groups as handed down ancestrally have created among the groups rancour between them as a result of historical misgivings.
These mishaps and mirror images that the groups have of each other because of their ethnic, religious and cultural differences have led to negative relationship in the form of discrimination, violence, deprivation, and exclusionary policies compounded by their specific conflict history.

References

[1] A.F.K Jilani, 2007. *A SHORT HISTORY OF ROHINGYAS AND KAMANS OF BURMA.* Chittagong: Kaladan News:.

[2] Bell, J. O., 2018. *Lecture Note-Theories of conflict.* Serekunda(KMC): Jared O Bell.

[3] Bell, J. O., 2018. *Lecture Note-Theories of Conflict.* Serekunda(KMC): Jared O Bell.

[4] Coleman, P. T., 2006. Power and Conflict. In: *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution.* San Francisco,: Jossey-Bass, pp. 1-959.

[5] Deutsch, M., 2006. Cooperation and Competition. In: *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution - Theory and Practice.* United States of America: Jossey-Bass, pp. 1-959.

[6] Durand, L., 2013. *Conflicts in Myanmar: A systemic approach to conflict analysis and transformation.* Lund(N/A): Lund University, Department of Political Science.

[7] Fisher, R. J., 1990. Needs Theory, Social. In: *Conflict: Human Needs.* Washington DC: THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, pp. 1-373.

[8] Oliver Ramsbotham, T. W. a. H. M. & etal, 2005. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

[9] Rahman, K. M. A., 2015. Ethno-Political Conflict:The Rohingya Vulnerability in Myanmar. *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS),* p. 3.

[10] Roy, R., 1990. Social Conflict and Needs Theories: Some Observations. In: *Conflict: Human Theory.* Washington DC: MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, pp. 1-373.

[11] Sohel, M. S., 2017. The Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Origin and Emergence. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences,* pp. 1-12.

[12] Unknown, 2016. *15-36 PDF.* N/A: N/A.

[13] W.Z.Initiatives, October 2015. *ROHINGYA BRIEFING REPORT,* N/A: War Zone Initiatives.

[14] Wasserberger, L., 2017. The Rohingya Origin Story:Two Narratives, One Conflict. *TANENBAUM Combating Extremism Fact Sheet*, 25 10, pp. 1-3.

[15] Williams, D. U., 2015. How Useful are the Main Existing Theories of Ethnic Conflict?. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies,* pp. 147- 152.

[16] Zaw, M., 2014. *Conflict Mapping: Rakhine-Rohingya Conflict in Myanmar.* n/a(n/a): Academia.