

DANCE: A Pacifist Philosophy of Protest

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Abstract

The quest for improved standard of living is universal and will continue as long as humans inhabit the earth. In most societies, the system provides institutional mechanisms for demands especially in democratic dispensations. However, given the perennial inequities in humanity and the insatiability of the human mind, protest has become part of human experience and it is considered a legitimate means of expression. Protest ranges from the localized to the globalized such as Arab Spring, which commenced with the self-emolition by a graduate vegetable vendor in Tunisia and snowballed across most of the Arab world bequeathing to humanity a consciousness of the capacity of citizens to transcend a multiplicity of differences, organize themselves against authoritarian and corrupt regimes and achieve a desired objective through protest. Given the high propensity of protests to turn violent, the paper studied the strategy adopted by Egbema (Rivers State, Nigeria) youths during the demonstrations of the early 1980s, which culminated in impressive developmental outcomes; it concluded by offering DANCE—a philosophy that, if imbibed and rigorously embedded in the process of protests, holds the promise of ensuring nonviolence in that legitimate means of input into the political system without compromising the realization of the objectives.

Keywords: Protest, demonstration, deindividuation, hivemind, *ahimsa*, nonviolence, die-in

Introduction

Between April and June 1989, Tiananmen (“Gate of Heavenly Peace”) Square lost the essence of its name as the Chinese government crushed a student-led demonstration for democratic reforms; thousands of the demonstrators were killed. The iconic picture of an unarmed man standing in front of a column of military tanks at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 thereby daring the Chinese government, symbolizes the extent of risk people are ready to take to express their opinion; in this case the pro-

reform demonstrations demanding democratic modifications from a communist regime. (CNN Online Library) From the Salt March in India led by Gandhi (Jacobs, 2002) through the Martin Luther King-led march on Washington, DC, USA, (Davis, 1989) the populist Tiananmen Square, Arab Spring to the widespread act of protestations across the world, demonstrations have become a permanent fixture in the daily lives of men; perceptibly, there is no day that passes without one type of protest or the other taking place in some corner of the earth. In Nigeria, demonstrations are very common, especially in the oil-rich Niger Delta where oil producing communities have imbibed the perception that *nuisance value* seems the most expedient means of attracting attention from the tenant international oil companies (IOCs). (Tare-Otu, 1992; Mitee, 2007; Odungweru, 2010) Unfortunately, demonstration have been allowed to become a norm in the daily lives of oil producing communities as no day passes without one or the other demonstrating against its oil prospecting tenant multinational. (

The paper aims at contributing towards mitigating the violent propensity of protests globally by offering a pacifist approach to activism without compromising the expected outcomes; the effort is couched within the Eastonian Model of Political System, which serves as the theoretical framework. Beyond this, we shall, define the words *protest*, *demonstration*, *deindividuation*, *hivemind* and *pacifism*; thereafter, we shall discuss the origin of the novel concept of DANCE, the circumstance that led to its development and its utility towards the realization of the objectives. Following this clarification, we shall subject DANCE to critical analysis vis-à-vis what obtains today in the Niger Delta and Nigeria in general. In the end, we shall draw conclusions and offer recommendations towards the nonviolent expression of populist opinions through protest, which, according to Gandhi, (1919:119) “is nothing but partial or total withdrawal of support from [a system] in an orderly manner and without anger or ill will.”

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Eastonian model of analysis with special reference to the input-output cyclicity of the political system. According to Easton (1965), the political system must provide viable institutional mechanisms for citizens to express their opinions, which serve as input into the political system; the programs, policies and laws made by various arms of government serve as outputs to which the citizens react as another set of inputs leading to cyclicity in perpetuity. (Easton, 1965) In most societies, the system provides ways and means for expressing demands or inputs especially in democratic dispensations where elections, letters to representatives, interactive sessions, town hall meetings etc give the citizens the opportunity to air their views on the affairs of the State. However, given the perpetual socio-economic disequilibrium in humanity and human insatiability, protests and demonstrations have become part of human experience and it is also considered as a legitimate means of expression since it is a step beyond the various means provided for inputs from the environment of the political system.

Contributing from the perspective of responsible government, James (2001:179) offers that government is expected to rule “according to public opinion and demands [and] accord consideration to the views of all segments of the society

when determining its policies.” It was in the realization that demonstration is a legitimate form of expression, an input from the social environment and fundamental part of the input-output cyclicity of the political system, that South African President Jacob Zuma froze the fees in South African universities following widespread student protest over an increase in tuition fees; this public policy decision came at the heels of what has been dubbed “the biggest student protest since minority rule ended in 1994.” (*BBC*, October 22, 23 & 26, 2015) However, Ariaga (2014:8) warns that “legitimacy... is eroded when and if it turns violent irrespective of who or what precipitated it.”

Protest, Demonstration, Deindividuation, Hivemind, Pacifism and Die-in: Definitions and Discussion

The words *protest*, *demonstration*, *deindividuation*, *hivemind*, *pacifism* and *die-in* are fundamental to this study; there is, therefore, the need to define and, to an appreciable extent, discuss them so as to give the reader a fair knowledge of the meanings towards enhanced understanding and appreciation of the essence of the paper.

Protest and Demonstration

A dictionary definition of protest is “a public expression of dissent especially if organized.” (Webster’s, 2002:1014) Webster’s (2002:341) also defines *demonstration* as “a public exhibition of condemnation [through] a procession.” Note that the word *public* is common to the two definitions while the import of the words *expression* and *exhibition* are contextually the same. Note also that *dissent* and *condemnation* implicitly share the same connotation while the words *organized* and *procession* signify the involvement of many people, preferably a crowd. Given these contextual commonalities *protest* and *demonstration* are used interchangeably in this effort.

Deindividuation

In 2008, in England, a teenager jumped from atop a parking garage after about 300 people chanted for him to “*go for it!*” Some took photos and videoed it; subsequently, the crowd dispersed, the strange spell of group goading was broken and, in solemn silence, the chanters walked away speculating what came over them. The answer is deindividuation; it occurs when people lose their sense of self, retreat into anonymity and inscrutability in a crowd hence malleable to the stimuli of the social environment; it is unconscious and, more often than not, manifests in misbehavior and destruction, jointly doing what the individual would ordinarily abhor. All it takes is one deviant act by one person and deindividuation is activated.

There is a pervading false impression that people who embark on demonstration are *hoi polloi* who were just looking for an excuse to steal and be violent; the truth is that there is a great tendency for people to lose their individuality and become absorbed into a hivemind under certain conditions. Zimbardo (2008) calls it the Lucifer Effect while Myers (2012) offers that there are three major ingredients that bring about deindividuation: anonymity, group size and arousal. Deindividuated persons lose inhibition, sense of self and fear of accountability; they are suffused in

the power of the crowd and then get slammed by a powerful cue from the environment. This culminates in otherwise rational people precipitating and participating in looting and vandalization; this is a major reason most demonstrations turn violent irrespective of how much they were planned to be nonviolent. We note that deindividuation is not always negative in its effect as it can also lead to prosocial behaviors. Spivey and Prentice-Dunn (1990) offer that prosocial cues influence deindividuated persons to behave philanthropically. A concept in social psychology generally thought to cause the loss of self-awareness in groups, the indicators of deindividuation are loss of self-awareness and evaluation apprehension and it occurs in group situations that foster responsiveness to group norms, good or bad—the hivemind.

Hivemind

There is no such word as *hivemind* in the dictionary; what we have are the words *hive* and *mind*; *hivemind* is, therefore, an effectual and convenient coinage from those two words to indicate the beelike, animated behavior of persons in the state of deindividuation. The coinage is informed by the automated, regimented and frenzied functionality of bees in their hive, which the dictionary also defines as “a place full of activity” (Webster’s, 2004:600) and the fact that the state of deindividuation culminates in a replica of beelike activities in a human setting, albeit momentarily. Hivemind is synonymous with deindividuation—they are two sides of one coin; however, while deindividuation pertains to the state of the mind, hivemind addresses the destructive hurry-scurry disposition of the deindividuated person.

Pacifism

A derivative from the word “peace,” pacifism is defined as “the attempt to achieve positive social change without recourse to any form of violence [and] pacifists maintain that violence should never be used to achieve any end, however attractive [the end] might be.” (Ekanola, 2006:39) As a human social disposition in the quest for social and political change, pacifism draws steam from Hinduism and the literature of Judeo-Christian theology. (Groff and Smoker, 1996; Matthew, 5:9) For instance, Mahatma Gandhi drew immensely from the Hindu religion, especially the Hindu notion of human life and the eminence of the human soul, in evolving the concept of *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) while Leo Tolstoy and the Reverend Martin Luther King Junior developed their pacifist positions from Christian precepts of love, forgiveness and the sacredness of life. According to Tolstoy (1987:178) violence would be abolished in human society once we “let the mist evaporate that hides from men the true meaning of certain deeds of violence and the Christian public opinion that is growing up will overcome the obsolescent pagan public opinion that permits and justifies deeds of violence.” In her contribution, Bondurant (1988:9) offers that the term “violent” is often used to signify “the willful application of force in such a way that it is intentionally injurious to the person or group against whom it is applied.”

Gandhi, Tolstoy, King, Mandela and other advocates of pacifism worldwide content that the nonviolent method is the idea approach in conflict resolution and in facilitating positive social change. The term nonviolent, as employed by pacifists, implies that restraint from taking up arms. It also includes a consistent effort to per-

suaide opponents to see the point of one's cause; here, as Gandhi points out: nonviolent actions do not aim at victory over the opponent, but at mutual benefits. Offering a variant of pacifism, which is called *radical or direct action*, Deming (1900) argues that pacifism may include the exertion of nonviolent pressure upon those resisting change so as to get them to consult their conscience and reconsider their positions.

Die-in

A variant of *sit-in* of old, die-in protests involve many protesters lying as if dead in front of a facility of the target institution in an obviously harmless but certainly obstructive manner.

DANCE: The Genesis and Its Essence

On June 28, 2015 two explosions occurred at the Ebocha Oil Center (EOC), a tank farm belonging to Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC), the multinational oil company operating in Egbema, Rivers State. The next day, June 29, 2015, another explosion occurred in the same facility. (*The Tide*, 2015) When "four days after the disaster, [neither NAOC] nor any other agency...[sent word or] relief materials to the locals...[regarding which] Augustine Ahiamadu, chairman of Ogba/ Egbema/ Ndoni Local Government Area [ONELGA]...expressed disappointment over the way and manner of response by the Italian oil giant," the chiefs and opinion molders of Egbema decided to embark on peaceful protest. (Ukwe, 2015:25) Consequently, in the wee hours of July 2, 2015, a contingent of youths went to the gates of the residential area of the company and attempted to take it over but was rebuffed by security operatives. Subsequently, the chiefs dressed in their regalia, drove to the gate and blocked it; following this, youths and women took over the gate by 7.30am ensuring that the workers did not leave the confines of their residence. The community erected canopies, provided chairs, invited a dance group that entertained and bought water and snacks to sustain the demonstration; it was nonviolent. Within a few hours, an ad hoc committee of the Rivers State House of Assembly chaperoned by Honorable Nathaniel Uwaji arrived for inspection following which the management of NAOC invited the community for discussions; the blockade was then removed.

From Osai (2007), we learn that the approach began with the relationship between Egbema and NAOC, which dates back to 1980 when a US returnee was drafted into Egbema Youths Association (EYA) in its march against NAOC; Osai furthers that, confronted by the violent propensity of the enterprise, the returnee sought ways and means of ensuring that the demonstrations did not degenerate into violence. Professor Andrew Sikula had sufficiently driven the realities of deindividuation into his head in graduate school during which he read the works of Mohandas Gandhi with special reference to the concept of *ahimsa*; (Gandhi, 1957; Herman, 2009) he also read Martin Luther King Jnr with special reference to King's insistence on nonviolence and had gone on multiple *pilgrimage* to Memphis, Tennessee, US where he walked the balcony of Room 306 in Lorraine Motel where King was assassinated on April 4, 1968. Given the position the returnee held in Rivers State Government, the prospects of a bright political career and a sense of responsibility and duty to self and community, he committed himself to ensuring that the process

of the venture did not turn violent; he then evolved the concept of DANCE and strenuously schooled EYA on the need be committed to its essence regardless of provocations by overzealous security operatives who may be acting out a script of their employers or may be deindividuated.

DANCE is an acronym carved from D=demonstrate (to attract) A=attention (for invitation to) N=negotiate (for) C=concessions (and) E=empowerment; the letters D, A and N are means to the objective of C and E. Concession pertains to infrastructural development while E (empowerment) addresses human capacity building; drawing from the three arms of big letter E are (1) education, (2) entrepreneurship and (3) employment in that preferential order. Note that *concessions*, *entrepreneurship* and, by extension, *employment* are related in the sense that the infrastructure demanded presents an opportunity for the gainful engagement for entrepreneurs from the community who would, inevitably, employ youths in the process of executing the projects—a win-win situation. DANCE is Gandhian; in its basic form, it is the temporary nonviolent removal of support in an organized manner and without ill will. Based on this philosophy, members of EYA were made to understand that demonstration in itself is not the objective; rather, it is the concessions and empowerment that can only come through negotiation that offer what they can take home and call their own. EYA was made to approach the protests with a sense of responsibility and duty to the community so as to achieve the objectives; members were psychologized into the realization that the only utility of demonstration is to attract attention so as to be invited for negotiation towards developmental concessions and empowerment; DANCE, therefore, became the philosophical foundation of EYA. This state of realization reflected on the attitudinal disposition of the leaders and members of EYA; the acronym it uncannily produced had a magic effect on them as it held the promise of a happy ending; “we shall dance in the end,” they sang during the demonstrations and that was how it ended as the effort fructified in very productive negotiations that led to concessions and empowerment.

Analysis

In a comparative analysis of rural communities in Nigeria vis-à-vis their state of infrastructural development, it has been offered that “Egbema (Rivers State) is the most infrastructurally developed in rural Nigeria.” (Osai, 2002:39) Though fallible since the yardstick for the comparison is not indicated, the point remains that Egbema community has had constant electricity and pipe-borne water since 1984 and most of the streets are tarred with concrete drains; these qualify the community to be classified as a highly developed community in rural Nigeria in terms of infrastructure. Either way, it is worthy of note to mention that this development is courtesy NAOC and were the products of the protests by EYA. In a two-page letter dated June 9, 1998 and signed by the president, secretary and public relations officer of a latter day EYA, it was attested that “the light and water Egbema and some other communities in ONELGA enjoy today, is the legacy left us by the vibrant leadership of some of our illustrious sons, who led the Egbema Youths in the past.” (Osai, 2007:xiv)

DANCE is the philosophy that informed the attitudinal disposition of the members of EYA of that epoch and, as attested to by current executives of NAOC,

the philosophy subsists till date resulting in a cordial relationship between Egbema and the company. As a philosophy, DANCE has the same DNA as Gandhi's Ahimsa and the nonviolence approach to civil disobedience advocated and adopted by Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King jnr of old and Nelson Mandela and other apostles of peaceful protest and Occupy Movements of later years. In the face of heightened trade unionism and the ever rising rate of citizens organized against corrupt and highhanded regimes and insensitive corporate multinationals worldwide, DANCE holds the promise of constructively confronting and engaging the system of a community, corporate and public governance without the destructive tendencies of hive-mind and deindividuation. In a tripartite meeting of NAOC and Egbema under the aegis of Rivers State House of Assembly on November 6, 2015, Honorable Israel Ngbwelo, Chairman of the Ad-hoc Committee on Ebocha Gas Explosion, averred that "Egbema is the most peaceful [oil producing] community." Granted that this could be seen as a rather sweeping statement, its relevance to Rivers State can be assumed given the fact that it emanated from the State House of Assembly.

Conclusion

Protest ranges from the localized to those that are globalized such as Arab Spring, which commenced with the self-emolition by a 26-year-old graduate vegetable vendor in Tunisia and snowballed into a colossal global phenomenon that culminated in far-reaching consequences in public policy across the Arab World: from the oust of Presidents Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt, the killing of President Gaddafi of Libya, oust of President Saleh of Yemen to grave public policy changes across the world; by the time the dust of Arab Spring settled, its effect had spread across the Arab World living in its trail a global consciousness regarding the capacity of citizens to transcend socioeconomic, cultural and religious differences and organize themselves against authoritarian and corrupt regimes and achieve the desired objective through Occupy Movements. (Osai, 2013)

Generally, most demonstrations that were intended to be peaceful turn violent; this is because individuals are easily deindividuated during demonstrations thereby resulting in a high propensity of their turning violent. While protest is a legitimate means of expression especially in democratic dispensations, Ariaga (2014) offers that "the legitimacy comes under question or is eroded when and if it turns violent irrespective of who or what precipitated the violence." DANCE is a philosophy and strategy for organizing and peacefully executing protests; it effectively psychologizes members of the movement to focus on the objectives of the venture and ensures that it is nonviolent in the tradition of *ahimsa*. The objective of DANCE is to suffuse sufficient measure of pacifism into activism. DANCE prepares the minds of the members to call off the demonstration and go to the next stage, which is Negotiations; it also burns into the minds of the negotiation team that Negotiation is all about the give-and-take of shifting grounds without losing focus of the objectives, which, in this instance, are concession and empowerment towards capacity building and overall development of the community. For Gandhi (1924) "life is but an infinite chain of experiments;" DANCE is an experiment that succeeded and has become a philosophy of passive resistance of which an ill and infirm Leo Tolstoy wrote is "a question of the greatest importance...for...the whole of humanity." (Hermann,

2009:179) DANCE insists that the leaders must propagate nonviolence with passionate and resolute single-mindedness.

Recommendations

A common motto of communities and organizations is “peace and progress;” the import of pairing the two words is found in the fact that development and progress cannot take place in the face of war or general insecurity; the exploits of the feuding flags over Syrian skies and the resultant wanton destruction of lives and property, which has culminated in what is considered the greatest exodus since the Second World War, testifies to the veracity of the motto. As it is with Syria, so it is with communities all over the world. In the Niger Delta, insecurity and the resultant exodus of foreigners have cost the economy very dearly and it is projected that recovery may take up to two decades. It is, therefore, recommended that communities should:

1. Be conscious of the symbiosis between them and their corporate citizens and tap into their operations in the overall long-term benefit of the community
2. Learn the lesson of DANCE and tap into its wisdom in the relationship; this is with special reference to:
 - Ensuring that the philosophy of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) is upheld in the process
 - Knowing when to lift blockade
 - Entering the negotiations with an open and focused mind and
 - Prioritizing the priorities in the process
3. Focus the demands on education and employment knowing that while the former is the irreversible area of development the latter lifts the lot of the beneficiaries and enhances community presence in the organization; this cannot be quantified monetarily especially if the beneficiaries harbor the passion of patriotism. While roads and other infrastructure are subject to time, the elements and maintenance culture, which is dismal in the Third World, education is not, neither is employment
4. Next to education should be human capacity building in the tradition of *alternative development*, which focuses on the individual; a thought that is instructive here is: “if a few persons cannot sleep because of hunger, then the community will stay awake because of their anger” (Osai, 2013b:7)
5. Every community, just like the individual, has an image; DANCE paints an impressive portrait of the community in the minds of the larger society; the gains of such portrayal cannot be quantified monetarily.

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