Conflict Studies Quarterly

Issue 32, July 2020

Contents

Zimbabwe:
Gukurahundi Victims' Monologues, State Silences and Perpetrator Denials, 1987-2017

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Abstract: The Zimbabwean government instigated *Gukurahundi* massacres resulted in the death of around 20 000 people. The majority of the victims belonged to the Ndebele ethnic group while the Fifth Brigade, a Shona dominated military outfit, were the main perpetrators of the mass killings. The atrocities ended with the signing of the Unity Accord of December 1987 between the ruling ZANU (PF) party, which had masterminded the atrocities, and the opposition (PF) ZAPU, whose supporters had borne the brunt of state highhandedness. After the cessation of hostilities the Zimbabwean government frustrated open conversations and public commemorations of the massacres. What conversations on *Gukurahundi* that took place were largely victims' monologues. To interrogate this state instigated silencing of exposure and remembrance the article suggests an exigency for counter-narrating erasures of memories of harm and impunity. In the aftermath of massacres, I argue, harmed communities embolden themselves and coalesce their fractured senses of self by openly memorialising their collective suffering through open conversations about their shared victimhood, commemorations, and the assembling of monuments. The Robert Mugabe led government's foreclosure of such avenues for public acknowledgements of mass injuries that are supposed to serve as visceral registers of what societies should remember to avoid in the future reveals its disregard for the wounded humanity of the constitutive political other. Thus, *Gukurahundi* as an historical episode reveals the pathology of mass harm silenced and rendered insignificant by the state.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Gukurahundi, Massacres, Denialism, Victimhood, Silenced.

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Introduction: Silences and Denialism beyond Mass Killings

Zimbabwe's state instigated *Gukurahundi* mass killings resulted in the death of around

20 000 people between 1983 and 1987 in the Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces (Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice [CCJP], 1997; Auret, 1992; Phimister, 2008). The overwhelming majority of the *Gukurahundi* victims belonged to the Ndebele ethnic group while the North Korean trained the Fifth Brigade, a Shona people dominated military outfit, were the main perpetrators of the mass killings. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front – ZANU (PF) – led government ostensibly established the brigade to quell dissident activities being perpetrated by renegade soldiers from the national army who were allegedly affiliated to the main opposition, the Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union – (PF) ZAPU.

The *Gukurahundi* massacres ended with the signing of the Unity Accord between then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe and the (PF) ZAPU leader, Dr. Joshua Nkomo, on 22 December 1987. The government declared a blanket amnesty for the protagonists, especially the armed combatants on both sides of the divide. The accord was an elite bargain that disregarded the wounded humanity of the constitutive political other. It side-lined the aspirations and ignored the pains of the ordinary Ndebele men and women in the villages who had borne the brunt of the *Gukurahundi* violence mainly because after the cessation of hostilities the government refused to have open and community initiated conversations on the massacres. Key state political actors implored society to let bygones be bygones by considering the Unity Accord to be an unimpeachable peace-building act.

Subsequent to the Unity Accord, official responses to the *Gukurahundi* massacres became an amalgam of silence and denial. Some state security establishment members that masterminded *Gukuruhundi* either downplayed the massacres by claiming the killings were an inevitable but unfortunate outcome of conflict or out-rightly denied culpability for the killings. Thus what conversations on *Gukurahundi* that took place in the country between 1988 and the end of President Robert Mugabe's rule in November 2017 were eclectic victims` monologues. The police regularly arrested artists that attempted to represent the *Gukurahundi* massacres through songs, paintings and plays for trying to disturb what the state arbitrarily defined as public peace and morality. These obstructions disregarded survivors' wounded humanity because in the aftermath of massacres harmed communities embolden themselves and coalesce their fractured senses of self by memorialising their collective suffering through commemorations, songs, dramas, paintings and the assembling of monuments. Halbwachs (quoted in Beristain, Paez, & González, 2000, p. 128) aptly argues that remembering is a normative process that allows people to have a personal and social identity. Thus by means of memorials, commemorations and rituals, reviving bonds with the deceased confirms a person's social identity and is a step towards re-appropriation of the past which supports a moral self-definition. The police and state security agencies also refused *Gukurahundi* survivors to properly inter their dead. These inhibitions disorient a people because "...participation in funeral rites and social sharing not only helps to enhance social

integration and restore one's self-concept and self-esteem, but also to foster collective memory" (Beristain *et al.,* 2000, p. 119).

The Zimbabwean government's concerted efforts at silencing and obstructing *Gukurahundi* memorialisations re-traumatised survivors, I argue, by forcing them to sublimate their pains instead of letting them off through memorialisations, renditions and re-narrations. Silence and denial over atrocities are time buying strategies by the perpetrators which would make survivor claims lose affirmative potency (Ricouer, 2006). Denialism is a technique of erasure, a default mode for negating the sense-making function of memory and other commemorative processes.

In interrogating the *Gukurahundi* silences and denialism, this article is informed by David Moshman`s four-phase theory on genocide which posits denial as the last stage of mass killings. In fact, "denial accompanies and follows genocide so routinely as to constitute its normative final phase" (Moshman, 2007, p. 126). The methods of genocide denial range from total rejection of the facts to more subtle means such as reluctance to investigate and unpack the intricacies of massacres; selective remembering of the past; re-contextualizing historical circumstances to render culpable actions normal, understandable, or inevitable; and educating children with textbooks selectively aimed at instilling rectilinear patriotism. Perpetrators and participants in acts of mass harm oftentimes deny their culpability because of the inherent desires of human beings to self-define and self-present as moral agents. Oftentimes, these perpetrators, especially when ensconced in the portals of state power, expect victims to overlook the pains of the past in the spirit of national unity and progress. In reality, for survivors the past is never past because they continue a tormented or anguished existence lived along side death, pain, destruction and denial. Thus, if possible, a sense of tragedy should be allowed to linger on in survivor communities.

The following parts of this article are divided into several sections. The first two sections, interrogate the historical and political dimensions of *Gukurahundi* and explain how it unfolded in the Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces. The subsequent sections ana-lyse state strategies of silencing the memories of the *Gukurahundi* atrocities that range from denials, obfuscation, intimidation, and legal restrictions from compensating and recognising victimhood. The Mugabe government frustrated the *Gukurahundi* harmed communities by denying them space and opportunities to re-member and re-heal their communities. In the aftermath of massacres harmed communities embolden themselves and coalesce their fractured senses of self by memorialising their collective suffering through commemorations, songs, dramas, paintings and the assembling of monuments.

The *Gukurahundi* Massacres in Historical Context

The *Gukurahundi* massacres were symptomatic of the pervasive incapacity of post-colonial African states to manage and withstand political diversity. Driven by the cal-

culus of destroying political opponents, the ZANU (PF) led government unleashed the Fifth Brigade into the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces a mere three years after independence in 1983. This intervention was ostensibly meant to quell dissident activities perpetrated by disgruntled ex-Zimbabwe People`s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) fighters deserting from the national army due to fears of persecution caused by the biased reintegration process into the new post-colonial Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). The ZIPRA men who did not escape from the country were either killed or endured ill-treatment in the ZNA especially after the expulsion from government of their (PF) ZAPU leadership in 1982 and 1983. These expulsions followed the discovery of arms caches on (PF) ZAPU properties and farms.

There is controversy on the circumstances leading to the presence of the aforesaid arms on (PF) ZAPU properties. Perhaps these arms were left over from the liberation struggle era because in the penultimate stages of the struggle, both Robert Mugabe's ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU "wanted to hide some of their arms during the period following the implementation of the Lancaster House deal, in case the Rhodesians reneged on the ceasefire. These weapons were held back by agreement between the two groups" (Jonathan Moyo quoted in Holland, 2008, p. 190). The two liberation movements mistrusted each other and they left residual forces and arms in the bush to maintain positions in the event that things did not work out in their favour in the build up to independence or soon after. There is also some speculation that the arms cache belonged to the African National Congress' (ANC) liberation army, *Umkonto weSizwe,* and that they were *en route* to South Africa for the prosecution of the anti-apartheid struggle (Chan, 2003, p. 22). The ZANU (PF) led government was aware of these multiple dimensions surrounding the arms cache.

Nevertheless, the government took the arms cache and advertised them as evidence of domestic security risk; as evidence that disgruntled ZIPRA fighters were preparing for insurrection in the Western part of the country, "that Nkomo's ZAPU party was untrustworthy and had withheld knowledge in bad faith and that it was now necessary to stamp out the internal enemy" (Chan, 2003, p. 22). The government further claimed that the dissidents were disgruntled ex-ZIPRA men who could not countenance the overwhelming loss of their party, (PF) ZAPU, to ZANU (PF) in the inaugural 1980 independence elections.

It also seems that the *Gukurahundi* massacres were a spill over from the unresolved liberation war era rivalries between the country's twin independence struggle movements of ZAPU and ZANU. These rivalries were exacerbated by the prevailing political mono-logic, especially in ZANU circles, whereby opponents were treated as "enemies of the people" who had to be pulverised into compliance at the slightest opportunity. According to Masipula Sithole, in spite of defeat at the 1980 elections that ushered the post-colonial dispensation (PF) ZAPU was still a well organised potent threat to the

fledgling ZANU (PF) government in the formative days of independence. Thus,

> ...with an arsenal of arms buried in various places in Matabeleland, and a cadre of young men aching to fight, ZAPU had not only the will, but also the capacity to test both Mugabe's will to rule and ZANU's capacity to survive. Post-independence dissident activity then must be seen in terms of this decisive test. It is a test that those intimately connected with the development of the liberation struggle could see coming, and that must fade away as Mugabe's will and ZANU PF's capacity are effectively demonstrated (Sithole, 1988, p. 240).

Essentially, the dissidents, engaged in low intensity and sporadic attacks on foreign tourists, isolated white farmers and government properties a situation that triggered jitters in the country's security circles. Some of the so-called hard-core dissidents, identified as Super ZAPU, were backed by apartheid South Africa as part of its sabotage campaigns or regional destabilization efforts against the newly independent Frontline States that were supportive of the anti-apartheid insurgents and all vestiges of colonialism in the region (CCJP, 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). These South African backed dissidents while posing as protectors of the people did everything in their power to alienate the people from the government. They attacked and destroyed government properties such as district and council offices, dip tanks and irrigation systems. In consequence, the Government renewed the Emergency Powers (Maintenance of Law and Order) Regulations which automatically invalidated aspects of the Declaration of Rights enshrined in Chapter 111 of the national constitution which guaranteed personal liberty, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association and freedom from government discrimination (Auret, 1992). The government also continued renewing Rhodesian era laws that indemnified in advance members of the security for unlawful acts committed against innocent or even suspected persons.

In spite of the state's highhanded response to the presumed dissident menace, it seems most of the dissidents had no intention of overthrowing the new Mugabe government. Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, (2000) claim they were largely insecure individuals compelled back into the 'bush' by "the life-threatening pressures of what they called 'the situation' and their abandonment by their leaders, who were often in jail or actively disassociated themselves from them and condemned their activities" (p. 192). The ZANU (PF) led government capitalized on the dissident phenomenon by exerting disproportionate force to annihilate (PF) ZAPU as an oppositional agent so that it could realise its hegemonic goal of establishing a one party state. In the 1980s, one party stateism was in vogue in much of the socialist aligned Global South. In some instances state security operatives also committed violations against the people and deliberately ascribed them to the dissidents in order to justify and escalate their retributions against a populace they accused of harbouring the dissidents.

Besides the regular army units and the police the government complemented the punitive Fifth Brigade mission by deploying other partisan forces such as the Central Intelligence Organisation operatives, ZANU (PF) Youth Brigades, the Police Internal Security Intelligence (PISI), and the Zimbabwe People`s Militia. Because of the regional nature of the dissident phenomenon these forces indiscriminately "lumped together (PF) ZAPU as an opposition party, (PF) ZAPU leadership, (PF) ZAPU supporters, the demobilized ex-ZIPRA combatants and all Ndebele speaking people as 'dissidents' and as a security threat" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003, p. 116). Top government leadership resorted to exterminatory rhetoric against (PF) ZAPU, its perceived supporters and the dissidents who claimed tenuous loyalty to ZAPU in spite of strong denials of such links by the ZAPU leader, Dr. Joshua Nkomo. In April 1983, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe revealed the indiscriminate nature of the *Gukurahundi* campaigns by stating that "Where men and women provide food for dissidents, when we get there we eradicate them. We don`t differentiate when we fight, because we can`t tell who is a dissident and who is not…" (The Telegraph, 2008, April 2). At a rally in Matabeleland in 1983, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Minister of State Security threatened perceived and real (PF) ZAPU supporters by saying "Blessed are they who will follow the path of the government laws, for their days on earth will be increased. But woe unto those who will choose the path of collaboration with dissidents for we will certainly shorten their stay on earth" (The Zimbabwean, 2016, March 23). In the same vein, Enos Nkala, then Minister of Home Affairs and, paradoxically, amember of the Ndebele ethnic group also deployed similar rhetoric against (PF)ZAPU and its supporters in the formative stages of *Gukurahundi.* He once said "…we want to wipe out the ZAPU leadership. You've only seen the warning lights. We haven't yet reached full blast …the murderous organization and its murderous leadership must be hit so hard that it doesn't feel obliged to do things it has been doing" (The Telegraph, 2013, October 17). All this exterminatory rhetoric triggered a frenzy of violence and political murders in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces.

The *Gukurahundi* Campaign:
A Reign of Carnage

The Fifth Brigade did not fall under the normal army chain of because its top brass reported directly to Prime Minister Robert Mugabe (Eppel, 2008, p. 3). From the moment of its initial deployment in January 1983 the Brigade, whose members were easily identifiable by their red berets and unique Chinese vehicles, deployed brutal tactics against civilians. People who experienced the wrath of the Fifth Brigade recall it, "through their ordeal stories, as merciless and an unmitigated evil even greater than the colonial Rhodesian Army" (Webner, 1992, p. 157). The Brigade and aligned militias resorted to draconian Rhodesian era emergency powers of collectively punishing communities through arson, roadblocks, occasional house-to-house searches without search warrants, looting of cattle, curfews and indiscriminate food embargoes

or starve-out-thy-enemy strategies (CCJP, 1997; Eppel, 2008). In some instances "the Fifth Brigade bayoneted pregnant women, saying 'Let's kill these dissidents before they are born'; they buried people alive and threw them into disused mine shafts; they forced some to do demeaning things to each other in public sex acts" (Moyo quoted in Holland, 2008, p. 186).

The Brigade complemented the foregoing egregious violence by reviving the *pungwe,* liberation war time night-time rallies popular with ZANLA. The *pungwe* was a platform for mobilising peasants for the war effort through guerrilla led consciousness raising lectures and songs. The re-enactment of *pungwe* during *Gukurahundi* was meant to discipline and humiliate people perceived as political renegades. According to Richard Webner (1995) people in Matabeleland regions,

> ...had to learn Shona songs, although few spoke Shona, and they had to clap while singing them in rallies that lasted the whole day. For the sake of making the people submit to her discipline, which also entertained the soldiers as something of a sport to watch, they pitted women from the chorus against each other as if they were gladiators. The women had to beat each other down, using poles. If the *pungwe* had taught some people the lessons of nationalism, the revival of the *pungwe* was political education of another kind entirely; it was a parody further alienating the people from their own state and raising their consciousness of quasi-nationalism and their awareness of the role of their own state in the polarisation of Shona and Ndebele (p. 199).

This quotation shows that the Fifth Brigade wanted to render politically pliable all the people in their operational areas.

Chan (2003) also claims that Fifth Brigade's "...primary function was to deny any possible base in the Matabeleland regions to the dissidents, and this denial was accomplished by scorched earth policies and plain murder of citizens in suspected locales of dissident activity" (p. 24). Able bodied young men and ex-combatants who had fought for the country's liberation under the banner of the Zimbabwe People Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) were haunted out of their villages by the Fifth Brigade, they had to seek refuge in the urban areas. Others went into exile to neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa. These attacks, tortures and killings seemed "to fulfil the objective of purifying and cleansing the body of the nation" (Webner, 1992, p. 160) by smothering out all vestiges of political opposition.

Apart from forced disappearances thousands were trans-located to detention centres in 1984. As the 1985 national elections approached, hundreds of key community leaders, especially those long established nationalists that led local level ZAPU structures, received nocturnal visits from state operatives in cars without number plates and took them away never to be seen again. Mugabe also warned people prior to the elections

that a vote for Nkomo's party would be interpreted as a vote for dissidents. Ultimately, after the elections he urged his people to remove the stumps in their backyards. ZANU (PF) youths and women took to the high density areas of Harare and elsewhere, looting, attacking and killing some ZAPU supporters and destroying their properties. A hotel in Shurugwi was destroyed together with Joshua Nkomo's farm (Todd, 2007). As noted above, the *Gukurahundi* massacres officially ended with the signing of the Unity Accord in December 1987. The accord, like all other post-conflict mechanisms in post-colonial Zimbabwe, was an elite bargain that disregarded victims' pains and traumas.

The Architecture for Silence and Denial
in Post-Conflict Zimbabwe

The lack of empathy for the physically and socially wounded individuals and communities in the aftermath of Zimbabwe's ever recurring episodes of politically motivated violence is deeply etched in the country's political firmament. From the attainment of independence in 1980, the government initiated a culture of pardoning perpetrators of human rights violations by resorting to state controlled instruments for achieving catharsis in the aftermath of mass politically motivated injuries. Such institutionalized processes for peace-building include unconditional reconciliation pronouncements, clemency orders and national amnesties (Mashingaidze, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Benyera, 2015, pp. 21-22). Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's once vaunted reconciliation pronouncement of 1980 essentially called for Zimbabweans to overlook the violence of colonial rule and the anti-colonial struggle. The post-colonial government allowed white Rhodesians who had harmed black communities through wanton violence, mass incarcerations, property destruction and dispossessions, as well as collective punishments such as curfews during the liberation struggle of the 1970s to move on with their lives without censure. Like in 1980, after cessation of the *Gukurahundi* massacres through the signing of the Unity Accord the government instituted Clemency Order Number 1 of April 1988 which granted unconditional amnesty to all protagonists.

State desires to silence public conversations on Zimbabwe`s multiple cycles of violence shows that every post-conflict scenario in the country has been characterized by fragile social harmony within communities because, assuming they can be perceived as instruments for healing, clemency orders and amnesties are narrowly legalistic. Besides showing perpetrators that politically motivated violence is not punishable, they also prevent them from expressing remorse and seeking the forgiveness of their victims. In the following sections the article unpacks and interrogates the rhetoric that has been appropriated and deployed by government officials to silence memorializations and deny culpability for *Gukurahundi* Massacres.

"Just a War" or "A moment of Madness":
***Gukurahundi* Deflections**

Government and ZANU (PF) leaders were reluctant to show remorse and acknowledge culpability for the *Gukurahundi* massacres, a majority of them claimed that "it was war" in order neuter their individual and collective culpabilities. When asked by a journalist about his involvement in the *Gukurahundi*, Enos Nkala, the former minister of home affairs and defence during the massacres stated that "…when there is conflict, the grass suffers, innocent people suffer" (Shortwave Radio, 2011, October 19). Through this statement Nkala was insinuating that the Fifth Brigade and other security forces' attacks on civilians were inadvertent, an inevitable consequence of armed conflict whereby civilians got caught up caught in the middle of a conflict situation. In this case, Nkala's posturing was misleading and it was a *post facto* re-presentation of *Gukurahundi* facts. During *Gukurahundi,* Nkala, who had a well-established history of animus towards (PF) ZAPU and its leadership, was a feared minister well known for his incendiary rhetoric against (PF) ZAPU supporters. From the 1960s heydays of African nationalism in Zimbabwe Nkala had always promised to crush ZAPU and its leader Joshua Nkomo. According to Daina Auret in 1980, Lord Soames, the country's transitional leader in 1979/80, banned Nkala from standing in the independence election because of his inflammatory campaign. In 1985 Nkala stood as a ZANU (PF) candidate in Matabeleland South, his home province, but received less than 10 percent of the vote (Auret, 1992, p. 164). He was only rescued from political oblivion by his ZANU (PF) allies who allowed him to fill up a parliamentary vacancy created in the Karoi District. Again in September 1985, as the Minister of Home Affairs, he spoke of his intention to crush ZAPU by declaring: "Let me assure the nation that the policy of reconciliation toward ZAPU has been withdrawn" (p. 164).

In October 1999, Nathan Shamuyarira, the former Minister of Information in a paean of praise for President Robert Mugabe carried in the *Financial Gazette* also revealed his lack of contrition for *Gukurahundi* by indicating that "If such a situation were to arise in any part of the country today, the government may be forced to resort to the same measures again as soon as it feels that law and order are being threatened" (quoted in Todd, p.405). Indeed, as Shamuyarira implied in the foregoing statement, the Zimbabwean government replicated mass human rights violations when confronted with determined opposition to its stranglehold on power between 2000 and 2008. It waged, without compunction, vicious campaigns against civilians through Operation *Murambatsvina* (Clean-out-the-filth) in 2005 and Operation *Makavhotera Papi* (Whom did you vote for?) against the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition in the aftermath of the heavily contested 2008 elections.

The closest that the country' erstwhile long-serving President Mugabe himself ever came to a *Gukurahundi* apology was in July 2000, at a memorial service for Joshua

Nkomo, when he described the massacres as "an act of madness, we killed each other and destroyed each other's property. It was wrong and both sides were to blame. We have had a difference, a quarrel. We engaged ourselves in a reckless and unprincipled fight" (quoted in Phimister, 2008, p. 206). Some leading former (PF) ZAPU cadres accused Mugabe of downplaying the Gukurahundi Massacres as "moment of madness" because they happened over a long and sustained period. Cephas Msipa, ZAPU's last Secretary General, argued that "Gukurahundi was not a days' event or a 'moment madness' because it began in 1981 and continued until1987 when the unity accord was signed" (The Daily News, 2015b November 27).

At different times, other leading security cluster ministers at the time of *Gukurahundi* tried to apportion all blame for the massacres on Robert Mugabe as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces during the *Gukurahundi* massacres. Enos Nkala, the same well-known rabid opponent of (PF) ZAPU mentioned above denied responsibility for the massacres in 2011 by telling off a reporter:

> You are peddling lies which you cannot prove. You ask Robert Mugabe about who formed *Gukurahundi*? Who deployed *Gukurahundi* in Matabeleland? Who gave them instructions to do what they did? It wasn`t me. Its people who are ill informed who pickthings from the press. You ask Mugabe, he owned *Gukurahundi*(Shortwave Radio, 2011 October 19).

Another alleged architect of the massacres, Emmerson Mnangagwa, now the President of Zimbabwe since November 2017, who was the Minister of State Security and had a proclivity for hate speech against (PF) ZAPU supporters at the time of *Gukurahundi* threatened to sue David Coltart whose autobiography captured quotes from some of his offensive speeches (The Zimbabwean, 2016 March 23). He also denied culpability by claiming he was not responsible for the deployment of the army by arguing that "How do I become the enforcer during *Gukurahundi*? We had the President, the Minister of Defence, Commander of the Army and I was none of that. My own enemies attack me left and right…" (Newsday, 2016 December 19). Through such deflections Mnangagwa was implying that it was Prime Minister Robert Mugabe in his capacity as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the Minister of Defence and the commanders of the army who exclusively planned *Gukurahundi*. These claims of non-involvement in *Gukurahundi* operations by someone who was the serving Minister of State Security at the time do not seem quite plausible. The Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) which was managed and controlled by the State Security Ministry was heavily involved in the massacres. The government considered the dissident menace to be an internal security matter which neatly fell within the CIO's operational mandate.

Other former high ranking officials such as Didymus Mutasa, a former State Security Minister, attempted to exonerate Mnangagwa by claiming the planning of the massacres

was a collective responsibility:

> ...actually I don't see why he is the only one blamed for *Gukurahundi*. The whole
> Cabinet during that time must blamed...There was JOC (the Joint Operations
> Command) which had [many] people, why are they not blamed? You keep
> blaming Mnangagwa anenge ane jambwa, ngaabike doro (he is cursed, he
> must be cleansed) (The Daily News, 2017 December 3).

Mutasa's statement was designed to downplay individual responsibility for the massacres by emphasising on collective and bureaucratic accountability. In the following section I interrogate Zimbabwe's culture of silencing and disregarding conversations about past political disturbances and harms.

The Painful Past is Unhelpful

Zimbabwe's post-colonial state leaders also 'compelled' citizens to forget, forgive and sublimate their pains after each of the ever recurring cycles of violence. This amnesia riven peacebuilding praxis forced citizens to "move on under the nation-in-recuperation banner of 'unity, progress and development'" (Mashingaidze, 2017). This forbidding approach to peace and reconciliation was expressed by Christopher Mutsvangwa, a former presidential adviser, in December 2017 when he insensitively argued against continued conversations on *Gukurahundi*:

> ...talking about the *Gukurahundi* issue ... is simply unhelpful and irresponsible... *Zimbabwe needs a break. To continuously re-dig its past, to settle scores from the past, as if it cannot grasp the future ... It diverts energy away from what should be done. Every country followed a tortured history ... You make mistakes. You make false starts* (Nehandatv.com, 2017 December 17).

Emmerson Mnangagwa, then Minister of Defence and one of the presumed masterminds of *Gukurahundi*, also claimed in 2011 that the nation should not open old wounds as this was retrogressive. "We do not want to undermine efforts by our national leaders to reunite the people. If we try to open healed wounds by discussing such issues, we will be undermining and failing to recognise the statesmanship exhibited by President Mugabe and his counterpart, Dr. Nkomo when they signed the Unity Accord" (The Herald, 2011 July 19). Former ZIPRA cadres such as Silas Nkala opposed these exhortations by arguing that it was a provocation to claim that *Gukurahundi* was now a closed chapter because "...people in the region were still grieving the loss of relatives hence the matter was still fresh in their minds" (Newsday, 2011 August 12).

Several studies affirm that *Gukurahundi* survivors in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces still require justice, truth and healing. Ngwenya and Harris observed that participants in their research "were clear that a lack of healing carried negative consequences for an individual, their community and the country in general" (Ngwenya &

Harris, 2015). Murambadoro and Wielenga (2015) made similar observations during their focus group interviews in Nkayi on the *Gukurahundi* survivors' expectations from the government. Their respondents defined a number of preconditions for genuine and deep seated reconciliation which included: acknowledgement *Gukurahundi* abuses; truth-telling; dialogues between victims and perpetrators; the release of the findings of several commissions of enquiry; and an apology by government to the victims. Most of these participants did not favour criminal prosecutions for the *Gukurahundi* perpetrators because trials would focus on determining culpability rather availing an empathic platform for the rendition of the victims' testimonies.

Silencing the Past:
Art and Commemorations

Outside the legislative realm, the government censored renditions of the *Gukurahundi* massacres through art and drama by invoking censorship laws under the guise of protecting public peace and morality as well as maintaining law and order. Such silencing of disturbing aspects of the past cripples a people`s capacity to articulate their sense of injury and this constitutes *memoricide.* Edgardo Civallero (2007) observed that "to destroy memory means to dispossess an individual or a group of their main tool for giving sense to their present. Because human beings need to extract, from their past, the necessary answers for understanding their current state and acting in the building of their future" (p. 2). This *memoricide* was apparent in 2008 when the award winning playwright Cont Mhlanga`s protest play "The Good President" which critiqued President Robert Mugabe`s rule, especially his highhanded approach to oppositional citizens in *Gukurahundi* era, was banned from being performed in Bulawayo. The play had only been staged a few times in the capital, Harare (Bhebe, 2011, p. 101).

Perhaps the most iconic representation of these crude gag tactics was the banning and dismantling of Owen Maseko`s *Sibathontisele* exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Bulawayo in August 2010 (Maseko, 2011). *Sibatonitisele* means "lets drip on them" in the local Ndebele vernacular and "refers to of the most notorious torture techniques employed by the Fifth Brigade – dripping hot, hot, melted plastic on victims" (p. 95). Maseko and Vote Thebe, the Gallery's Curator were initially arrested for violating Section 33 of the Criminal Codification Act which punishes anyone who undermines the authority of the President. Ultimately, the state's prosecution efforts failed in the High Court of Zimbabwe because the police later tried to charge Maseko under Section 31 of the Criminal Law and Codification Act which prohibits the "publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the state" (Newsday, 2014 September 14). The collapse of the state's case against Maseko shows that the reasons for prosecution were weak from the onset. In fact, this confirms that the state's well worn out strategy of arresting political opponents on flimsy grounds in order to cast aspersions on their *bona fides* and to politically disable them by making sure that they spend inordinate amounts of

time and resources while trying to defend themselves in the courts of law. In most cases people arrested on these spurious grounds were acquitted. Other laws that frustrated *Gukurahundi* disclosures included the Public Order and Security Act's (POSA, 2002) Section 15 (10-11) which proscribed people from communicating falsehoods that had the potential of inciting public chaos, cause economic ruin or impugn the image of the government and undermine the image of the President. This section of the Act implied that if a person were to speak of the *Gukurahundi* massacres, claiming that the government and the ruling party were involved, and stirring up chaos, even though they were telling the truth, they could be prosecuted (Newsday, 2014, September 14).

In addition to frustrating any renditions of the massacres through art and drama the state tried to impinge any commemorations of the massacres. Groups such as Ibhetshu Likazulu, a Bulawayo based pressure group was barred by the police from commemorating the massacres (Daily News, 2015a February 17). In 2016 the commemorations proceeded at Stanley Square in Bulawayo only after appealing to the courts of law. These state instigated frustrations of commemorations is unfair to harmed communities because "memorials are symbolic reparations" (Hopewood, 2011, p. 6).

The Paradoxical Inconvenience of Victimhood

Perhaps a bit intriguing were the responses of former (PF) ZAPU members who decided to be silent about the massacres or simply harped on the import of unity and development at the expense organising and supporting *Gukurahundi* related commemorations, cleansing and truth telling activities. Alexander, MacGregor and Ranger (2000) noted that soon after the Unity Accord "senior members of the former ZAPU (who were now in government) made a quick conversion to the merits of silence, maintaining that 'old wounds should not be opened" (p. 257). This was mainly because "the violence of the 1980s had become embarrassing, troublesome, an obstacle to the consolidation of a new myth unity" (p. 257). For example, when confronted with the discovery of human remains at Antelope Mine in Kezi District, his home area and political stronghold Vice President Joshua Nkomo told assembled crowds that he could not answer any questions in the absence of his colleagues and co-Vice President, Simon Muzenda (Parade, 1992). High ranking ZAPU officials who joined government after the Unity Accord have also attempted to gag *Gukurahundi* conversations for the sake of unity and national development. In 2011, Vice President John Landa Nkomo angered former ZIPRA combatants when he claimed that "...quite often, those who talk about it [*Gukurahundi*] were never victims or were born yesterday and are too young to comprehend what happened and why. President Mugabe and Dr. Nkomo agreed that *Gukurahundi* was a closed chapter" (Newsday, 2011 July 4).

Former Vice President Mphoko, a former (PF) ZAPU cadre who was also arrested during the *Gukurahundi* days when he was serving in the intelligence services, stirred a hornet's nest in 2013 and 2014 when he argued on numerous occasions that Mugabe

was not responsible at all for the massacres. Rather, he claimed it was a conspiracy network of apartheid South African elements bent on destabilising the nascent post-colonial state, Western government seeking to prevent the spread of communism in the region, especially in South Africa, and ex-Rhodesian state security agents working in post-colonial government who wanted to create enmity between the Shona and the Ndebeles who fomented the massacres (Newzimbabwe.com, 2018 August 6).

The former (PF) ZAPU leadership's contradictory reluctance to confront the foreboding *Gukurahundi* legacies shows the possible recanting of positions and loyalties that leaders of victim groups of state repressions and exponents of 'rebellious political positions' go through when they become co-opted into the portals of power by their former adversaries and persecutors. It also shows that clearly articulating and negotiating the victim/perpetrator position is sometimes difficult in post-conflict situations where the perpetrators are not the losers. Victims can only condemn perpetrators and litigate against an egregious past in post-conflict situations where they simultaneously acquire state power and by association legislative traction and the moral high ground.

Gukurahundi Entanglements:
The Rhetoric of Subterfuge and Obfuscations

A comprehensive and non-partisan resolution of the *Gukurahundi* massacres was impeded by a complex intermingling of divergent political ideals, divided memories, conflicting ethnic-politico histories, contesting definitions of political harm, and legal loopholes that allow perpetrators of violence to go unpunished such as statutes of limitations. Such entanglements of contesting definitions of political harm, for example, were well encapsulated by the country`s co-Minister of the Organ on National Healing, Integration and Reconciliation(ONHR), Moses Mzila-Ndlovu who critiqued the country`s abortive national healing efforts by observing that:

> ZANU (PF) today is in denial of the [*post-colonial*] atrocities, they say its water under the bridge but they want to talk about the atrocities of Smith's [*colonial*] regime. This is very hypocritical for them to want to wish away fresh crimes because they will never die. When it is election time, they talk about the liberation massacres. If you are to talk about crimes let us not choose because *Guhurahundi* is so fresh and the organ needs to deal with this…This is so because ZANU (PF) rule is premised on the divide and rule [sic]. They want to divide us on tribal lines. If people cannot talk about *Guhurahundi*, how then can we then establish healing and reconciliation? People during the *Gukuhurandi* debacle were murdered for their Ndebele language. How then do we heal and integrate people without addressing this issue? (Daily News, 2012 March 12).

The intermingling of largely in-congruent interests towards national healing embedded in the foregoing quotation frustrated the establishment of comprehensive national peace

building projects and all-inclusive state making. President Mugabe also attempted to downplay calls for *Gukurahundi* investigation as mere political posturing:

> It's just political. It's just politics that people try to gain out of it. *Gukurahundi*-as it happened- what was it? You had party with a guerilla force that wanted to reverse democracy in this country. And action was taken. And, yes, there might have been excesses, on both sides. True, it's not the fact that there was Gukurahundi which was wrong. It's the fact that there have been excesses that have caused some people to suffer. But we'd have to start with the excesses of Smith – and the colonialists, the British, who were still in charge – because lots of people disappeared; lots of people died (Holland, 2008, pp. 240-241).

Some state functionaries reduced any talk about *Gukurahundi,* especially by survivors, political parties and civil society to crass opportunism designed to shoring up grievance rather ideologically driven political agendas. For example, Nathaniel Manheru, a prolific media columnist who was believed to be the George Charamba, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and also the Presidential Spokesperson, once argued that *Gukurahundi* "has become a real blackmail, an unchallenged vehicle for pursuing ignoble interests while using guilt and tribal sentiment to claim immunity from rigorous scrutiny and challenge" (The Herald, 2010 August 28). After the 2013 harmonised election, Manheru again opposed what he thought were the Movement for Democratic (MDC) formations' vacuous *Gukurahundi* driven politics by acerbically noting that:

> The two MDCs' failure to produce any credible manifestos was quite indicative. Their failure to rouse the masses, to move the masses beyond bitter criticism of 2008, towards their own vision of society, clearly showed how unreal they are as a political force. Much worse, their fascination with devolution and *Gukurahundi*, all against a society long evolved to new, modern forms of socio-economic foci, showed how antiquated and out of touch their politics are (Manheru, 2013).

Manheru's critiques of any public conversations on *Gukurahundi* amounts to some gagging of memorialisations of the massacres and a disregard for the wounded humanity of the constitutive political other.

Conclusion

This article which suggests an exigency for combating memorial atrophy on the *Gukurahundi* massacres has revealed that there was adeeply ingrained lack of political will in the Zimbabwean body politic to appreciate, acknowledge and rehabilitate the wounded humanity of the *Gukurahundi* victims in the Mugabe era. To date, as in the tension ridden 1980s, the extent to which the abuses of the Fifth Brigade were sanctioned

by the Zimbabwean government remains an underexplored question. The government never acknowledged that members of the Fifth Brigade were responsible for the large number of the dead and wounded civilians. This silence vapours off any sense of scandal in the aftermath of the deployment of disproportionate violence against perceived opponents. The government's silences on the *Gukurahundi* massacres was a potent and painful weapon against survivors because it denied them the status of officially recognised victims. Disregarding people's injuries and losses pushes survivors into ever diminishing cycles of being. This insensitivity was abetted by laws that prevented victims of violence from seeking compensation from the state through the courts of law. In spite of the fact that the traumas of the past still resonated in the present through the survivors' constant clamouring for reburials, and commemorations the perpetrators of the massacres preferred a selective reading of the country`s catalogue of violence by harping on colonial injustices against blacks while being silent on post-colonial violence. Artists that attempted to either paint or stage plays relating to *Gukurahundi* were obstructed and arrested by the police for trying to disturb public peace and morality. All this showed that *Gukurahundi* perpetrators preferred survivors to sublimate their pains and 'move on' without healing and cleansing their wounded social bodies. The Perpetrators claimed that open and public reburials could tear the nation apart, thus the nation had to be silent about the massacres. This stance negated the veracity of victim and survivor narrations of the massacres. Finally, besides the deliberate silences and denials on the massacres by high ranking state security officials noted in the foregoing, there are no accessible official documents about what transpired during *Gukurahundi*. The findings of key government commissions set up concurrent to the massacres remain sealed in state vaults. This lacuna of state generated evidence on the *Gukurahundi* massacres creates a partial understanding of the atrocities.

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Nigeria:
Delta Oil Exploration Politics and the Portrayal of Brutal Impact in Yerima's *Hard Ground*

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Abstract: This study presents an interdisciplinary approach towards a critical analysis of some impacts of crude-oil exploration in Niger Delta and polemics of viable conflict resolution framework. This approach involves analysis of Ahmed Yerima's creative portrayal in *Hard Ground* which revolves around the variables activating conflicting emotional interests in matters concerning 'black gold' in Nigeria, and how these variables resonant in debates and demands for Nigeria's polity restructuring because of perceived resource mismanagement. More so, our scope includes an analytical attempt at illuminating elaborately our interpretation of the dimensions to the loud and shrewd inclinations subsuming what some see as solution to the lingering conflict, and the suppositions explaining why others see the debates and demands on polity restructuring as dark convoluted ploys aimed at hidden agenda. Hence, through select theories of victimhood, this study attempts to elucidate on the variables propelling conflicting emotional interests about oil exploration in Niger Delta, by looking interpretively hard and deep on the perspectives, views and suppositions defining the ideologies and inclinations propelling them. In the end, this study notes that the disenchantments and troubles with Nigeria's polity framework and structure as it relates to oil exploration in Niger Delta are subsumed in *Hard Ground's* creative contribution as a means of assessing the points to the fault-lines that characterize the subsisting socio-political structure upon which Nigeria stands and wobbles.

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Keywords: crude-oil, emotional interests, politics, polity restructuring, Niger Delta.

Introduction

How plausible is the assertion by very many scholars, human right activists and citizens that the socio-political structure and framework upon which Nigeria stands, makes her to wobble? Again, how factual is the claim that "one of the major topical concerns that have taken the centre stage in scholarly as well as pedestrian discourses in Nigeria in recent time is the apparent intractable web of Nigeria's socio-political woes" and the "polemics of corruption and leadership failure" (Aniago, 2017, p. 25). Furthermore, is it rational and plausible to suggest that "Nigeria's troubles are primarily beyond dumping of blame semantics solely on leadership failures due to sheer incapacity and corruption" and is it tenable to argue that "the troubles are essentially subsumed in entrenched culture of hypocrisy and lack of faith in Nigeria" (Aniago, 2017, p. 25). More so, to what extent do we align with Chinua Achebe's supposition in his celebrated essay *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Wole Soyinka's dense purviews in *Interventions V: Of Power* that leadership failure is the major variable keeping Nigeria in throes, orchestrating retrogressive, chaotic and deplorable parochial sentiments? (Ebiede, 2011; Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2012; Clark, 2016; Osuagwu & Olaifa, 2018). Finding from our review of several relevant literature indicates a preponderance and concordance of suppositions and perspectives, in support of the hypothesis that sociology of living life, which includes the twists and turns which propels progress, conflict and pain are realities that emerge majorly because of people's capacity and approaches to management of resource in response to subsisting and projected circumstances. If this is a plausible hypothesis, how then does it explain the retrogressive politics, painful twists and agonizing atmosphere persisting in Niger Delta and Nigeria in relation to crude-oil exploration?

To discuss these purviews as clearly as possible, we shall start by critically looking at three inter-connected trajectories. These trajectories are definitive highlights projecting the extant impacts of crude-oil exploration in Niger Delta; how these extant impacts add towards instigating the subsisting victimhood inclinations of Niger Delta people; how these inclinations are dramatized in Yerima's *Hard Ground* as shades of extreme dimensions of bad, disturbing and ugly interests, particularly the underbelly and labyrinths of Nigeria's polity restructuring debates and demands; and our idea of functional conflict resolution paradigm. In a bid to place our discussion in clear perspective, we shall make attempt at explaining what Niger Delta represents, before providing highlights on a few prominent examples of impacts of crude-oil exploration in Niger Delta. Furthermore, we shall interpretively assess Yerima's creative depiction of the contexts of the subsisting victimhood inclinations of the Niger Delta people in *Hard Ground*, and how mismanagement and maladministration instigate nuances of demands and debates for polity restructuring by Niger Delta people and some other Nigerians, as well as the polemics of counter demands and debates by others. To this end, we intend to explain what polity restructuring mean as a universal idea, and its plausible application as a means of conflict resolution mechanism within Nigeria's subsisting context.

We shall also look at its dimensions, the reasons why the cries and tears are becoming increasingly disturbing in relation to Niger Delta oil malady, and the nuances of blame on leadership failure as suggested by overwhelming number of scholars.

Niger Delta and Oil Exploration

The Niger Delta, located in the Atlantic coast of southern Nigeria is the world's third largest wetland. It occupies a total land area of 75,000 square kilometers, and it is the world's second largest delta with a coastline of about 450 km (Awosika, 1995; Ukiwo, 2009). As of June 2020, Niger Delta is composed of 9 out of 36 states in Nigeria, (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Imo and Rivers), and has 185 out of 774 local government areas. The strategic polito-economic importance of Niger Delta revolves around the fact that nearly all of Nigeria's proven oil and gas reserves and a total of 159 oil fields and 1481 wells in operation are located in the region (Nwilo & Badejo, 2006). Total production from Nigeria's oil fields in Niger Delta region increased from 308 million barrels in 1970 to 703,455 million barrels in 1991 and production peaked in 1980s when the total output was 753.5 million barrels per annum, out of which 93% was exported overseas (Nwilo & Badejo, 2006). Though the GDP ratio contribution of oil and gas dropped significantly from average of 37% to 40% achieved in 1980s, 1990s and beyond, to an average of 12% in 2000s, it has delivered from the 1970s to 2019 more than 70% of foreign exchange for Nigeria. Thus, between 2000 and 2004, oil and gas accounted for 75% of total government revenues, and 97% of foreign exchange earnings (Ukiwo, 2009). According to Nigeria's Budget and National Planning report titled *Nigeria Economy Recovery and Growth Plan – 2017 to 2019*, "Nigeria's economy is highly dependent on the oil and gas sector" and "although the sector accounts for just 10% of GDP, it represented 94% of export earnings and 62% of Government revenues (for Federal and States) in 2011-2015" (Nigeria Ministry of Budget & National Planning 2017, p. 28). Also, according to Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics in its quarterly publication titled *Nigerian Gross Domestic Product Report*, *Q1 2019*, the petroleum sector contributed 8.6% in 2018 and 9.14% in the first quarter of 2019 to Nigeria's GDP but accounted for about 90% of Federal Government income in the period under review. Furthermore, in the above mentioned report, the Ministry of Budget and National Planning observes that the "falling oil revenues widened the Federal Government deficit from N1.2 trillion in 2013 to N1.4 trillion in 2015, and an estimated N2.2 trillion in 2016", hence "States in particular have been badly hit by the oil price shock in 2015" (ibid p. 29). Again, in the same report, the Ministry of Budget and National Planning notes that "40% of States were running a deficit of more than 30% of their revenues" thus "fiscal sustainability is therefore a critical challenge for Nigeria" (ibid p. 29). This brief insight indicates that most of the federating States in Nigeria are heavily dependent on federal allocation to remain solvent and this allocation comes majorly from oil sales income. Therefore, through the above highlight, which paints a vivid picture of the fiscal

framework of Nigeria, it is possible to appreciate better that since Nigeria joined the ranks of oil producers in 1958, when Shell British Petroleum, discovered and drilled oil at Oloibiri, that Niger Delta had remained consistently vital to Nigeria's fiscal viability, as well as very important to global energy security (Ukiwo, 2009).

Introduction to Ahmed Yerima's[1] *Hard Ground*

The story in *Hard Ground* revolves around a young man named Nimi. He is portrayed as a militant who represents the subsisting victimhood and freedom-fighting ideologies of some Niger Delta youth who believe that the only way available to them to make the federal government listen is through militancy. Nimi was sent to his village in Niger Delta by his parents who reside in Lagos to learn Ijaw language and culture as a way of keeping their heritage alive. However, in the village, Nimi gets radicalized and enlists with one of the militant groups. Rapidly, he strives to lead as he becomes a vicious cult linchpin and goes by the gang name Scorpion. In his attempt to impress the big commanding militant leader, he selects some members of his gang to vandalize crude-oil pipe as part of economic sabotage aimed at destabilizing oil distribution and economic process to hurt the Federal Government. Unfortunately, his plan was leaked to the military task-force mandated to secure the pipe-lines by 'rats' in his fold. Armed with this tip-off, the task-force promptly mobilized, ambushed Nimi's gang and neutralized most of them summarily as they arrive to break oil pipes.

Victimhood Inclinations,
Impact of Oil in Niger Delta and Yerima's *Hard Ground*

In this creative representation of some typical realities relating to Niger Delta oil conflict, Ahmed Yerima in our focus text *Hard Ground*, artistically interrogates through deft portrayals, the variables, conditions, worldviews and shades of politics defining the social realities of Niger Delta oil conflict. In the play, Yerima depicts the dense realities of familial relationships and the attendant climate of squabbles resulting from inter-personal conflicts. Thus, in his authorial note for *Hard Ground*, Yerima attempts

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1   Ahmed Yerima, a Nigerian theatre studies professor, prolific playwright and theater director was born in Lagos on 8th May 1957 were he had his primary education and his secondary education at Baptist Academy in Obanikoro, Lagos. He served as director-general of the Nigerian National Theatre, & a director of the National Troupe. He taught in universities in Nigeria, and became a professor of Theater and Performing Arts, and the dean, College of Humanities, Redeemer's University Nigeria in 2013. Among Yerima's plays are *Ameh Oboni the Great*, *Attahiru*, *Heart of Stone*, *Idemili*, *Kaffir's Last Game*, *Little Drops*, *Mojagbe*, *Orisa Ibeji*, *Otaelo*, *The Angel*, *The Bishop and the Soul*, *The Lottery Ticket*, *The Mirror Cracks*, *The Sisters*, *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, *The Twist*, *The Wives*, *Uncle Venyil*, *Yemoja*, and *Hard Ground* which won Nigeria's highest literary prize 'LNG Literary Prize' in 2006.

to contextualize on his story's thematic inclination by citing a comment by William Maxwell, who poignantly adumbrates philosophically on conflicting interests noting that "too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable, and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things so that they conform to this end" (Yerima, 2011, p. 9). Again, Yerima pointedly observes that in *Hard Ground* he attempts to share as well as instigate analytical interest on capacity and contexts of the human mind particularly "its complexities" as it relates to "man's ability to remain supremely wicked or good" (ibid, p. 9). Arguably, the description of human behavior as either supremely wicked or good, no doubt depends on the angle one chooses to appraise it. Essentially, Yerima portrays some variables of 'conflicting emotional' experience which revolves around the realities of oil exploration in Nigeria, as factors which have for decades instigated extreme dimensions of bad, disturbing and ugly emotional interests. As we intend to elucidate in later parts of this study, emotional interests is metaphorically projected as powerful inclinations propelled by ideology and survivalist penchants.

Through the character Nimi, Yerima attempts to illuminate on the reasons behind individuals' exhibition of specific kinds of emotional interests. Nimi is portrayed as a hot-headed brat who lacks respect for his father because his father in his imagination represents the old generation who appear indifferent and docile concerning the brutal oppressive realities that the people face. Nimi's response to his mother's lamentation that he has derailed, in many ways, subsumes the youth's feeling towards the old generation: "You cannot grow up in our ways, as you put it, Mama, and not feel what I now feel, unless you want to hide in the folds of your wrapper, like Baba, and pretend that all is well" (ibid, p. 13). Here, the subsumed illumination is that youths in Niger Delta find themselves in a generation with more youth population, who have far less opportunities in comparing to the realities faced by the old generation, and painfully the future remains glaringly stark if nothing urgent is done. The above utterance by Nimi, enunciates his subsisting ideology which propels his disdain and impatience towards his father and mother (who both represent embodiments of docile old generation), which makes him feel intense anger about himself and the prevailing circumstance.

The projected rational choice subsumed in Nimi's professed ideology is based on the premise subsumed in the following comment which he directed to his mother and father: "the school you sent me to was made up of wasteland and poverty" and "even as a child, you smell it and you quickly learn that nothing is free, unless you ask for it, and when they refuse to give you, you grab it, and that is what we are doing" (ibid, p. 13). Nimi's comment paints a disturbing picture to his parents especially his mother. Expressively Nimi explains:

> *Boys first growing up fighting for bean cakes and puff-puff. Then, gradually, we were forced to grow to become men overnight. Asking for our rights* (ibid, p. 13).

In response, his father asks "*so it your right to kill?*" and bluntly Nimi retorts: *"If we have to, Baba*" (ibid, p. 13). Nimi's astringent comments and demeanour pushes his mother to the edge and she helplessly gets overwhelmed as tears cascades. Regardless, Nimi remains impervious and caustic, as he drives home his ideology and philosophy subsumed in the following point-of-view:

> *Poverty stinks, and if another man holds the soap, and won't let you have it, then nudge him slightly and collect it. For you need a good bath to become a decent performed human being like him* (ibid, p. 13).

Clearly the hard-hearted disposition demonstrated by Nimi as he resolutely projects his inclination, leads his mother to more tears. However, instead of any show of remorse, Nimi rebukes his mother subtly in the following comment in his attempt to validate his conduct and inclination:

> *Why does Mama cry? There are younger boys and girls than me in the struggle. Children who believe in the cause. First, you listen to what the elders say about the struggle. Even when in primary school. You live in pain, and then it sounds right to join the struggle, first as a boy of a group, then as the eye or a spy. By the time you are halfway through primary school, you carry guns for the boys, and by the time you are eleven, in these days of automatic guns, you become an expert. You see people die every day. Either of hunger or just death, so it means nothing to you. It is a hard life, Mama* (ibid, pp. 13-14).

Nimi who is projected as an archetype of the youth with conflicting emotional interests, presents his logic which encapsulates his ideology and philosophy, and through Nimi's comment, Yerima attempt to clearly portray how the social construction of reality in Niger Delta has gradually as well as rapidly developed and evolved because of the prevailing environment and stark social realities. Meanwhile, Yerima indicates through the disposition and comment of Mama that the old generation apparently does not share in the militant inclinations and extreme worldviews of the youth, when she tearfully says:

> *Brothers [...] warriors my foot, I have only one child, Nimi, only one child. And now you must curse me to tears by your stupid words and dreams* (ibid, p. 11).

Mama's comment suggests that Nimi's words are largely outburst propelled by exuberant youthful disposition, hence she laments hysterically as her husband attempts to calm her down:

> *My only child turns a monster before my death? How else can I exorcise this evil spirit from my baby?* (ibid, p. 11).

Through Mama Comment, metaphorically, Yerima alludes to the degree of radicalization of the youths as a result of collective victimhood inclination and troubles relating

to the subsisting subjugation and exploitation by the multinationals, the Government and their errand boys and girls. The victimhood inclinations in Niger Delta is mainly hinged on the premise that the beginning of oil exploration brought with it massive financial gains to Federal Government and perennial socio-economic pains to the Niger Delta. The pain in Niger Delta is subsumed in the profound changes to their livelihood which are mainly fishing and farming. This is because of rapid environmental pollution, degradation and deprivation, without commensurate reparation. Hence they feel they have gained abysmally, incurred monumental losses, such as the degradation of their environmental serenity and their sources of livelihood, whereas billions of petro dollars are spent in select parts of Nigeria with clear neglect to their domain. This feeling subsumes the nuances of victimhood in relation to the subsisting inclinations of Niger Delta people to the Federal Government approach to their realities. To explain the contexts of referring to Niger Delta people as victims and the conceptualization of victimhood, we turn to a definition which subsumes the views we are espousing in this discuss:

> *People are victims if and only if (1) they have suffered a loss or some significant decrease in well-being unfairly or undeservedly and in such a manner that they were helpless to prevent the loss; (2) the loss has an identifiable cause; and (3) the legal or moral context of the loss entitles the sufferers of the loss to social concern* (Bayley, 1991, p. 53).

Similarly, examining victimhood and its nuances Tami Amanda Jacoby, observes that "in contemporary violent conflicts, the construction of grievance-based identity is a fundamentally contested process as the lines between victim and perpetrator are blurred by ongoing cycles of belligerence and retribution" therefore "as victims are incorporated into broader political campaigns, it becomes nearly impossible to separate the victim from the politics" (Jacoby, 2014, p. 511). More so, another definition of victimhood elucidating our point explains that "self-perceived collective victimhood is a state of mind that is brought into being by society members and transmitted to the members of new generations" through assimilation (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009, p. 257). Furthermore, the above school of thought explains that:

> *The establishment of this state of mind is based on real experiences and on the process of social construction. Once it evolves it is solidified and has important implications for society members, for the way the conflict is managed and for general intergroup relations of the victimized group* (Bar-Tal *et al.*, 2009, p. 257).

The process of social construction is about the way and manner a group of people who share the same experiences, environment, history and identity are propelled to define their realities which are subsisting around and about them, thus, "the sense of self-perceived collective victimhood is an unavoidable part of the human repertoire in the context of intractable conflict" (ibid, p. 258). Therefore, interpretive analysis of contexts

to vicious cycle of conflicts involving claims of victimhood means that:

> *Societies involved in this type of conflict experience losses, bleed and suffer, and themselves cause losses, injuries, destruction and suffering to the rival. However, the real test for humanity is whether the groups involved eventually begin to see the contours of human beings on the other side of the fence, through the dark clouds of enmity that obscure them* (ibid, p. 258).

Similarly, other scholars argue that the sense of victimhood develops when there is "self-perception of having been the target, either momentarily or over time, to harmful actions emanating from one or more other persons" thus "in the most general sense, a victim is anyone who experiences injury, loss, or misfortune as a result of some event or series of events" (Aquino & Byron, 2002, p. 71). The Niger Delta people as subsumed in Yerima's portrayal feel they are badly disadvantaged because their main occupations which are fishing and farming are being taken away from them without any viable substitute, knowing the fact that more than 60% of the people of this area depend on the natural environment for their livelihood (UNDP, 2006, p. 73). Therefore the victimhood identity of the Niger Delta people steams from their perception of their continuing psychological injury and loss because of their misfortune resulting from effects of crude-oil exploration in their communities, because right from the inception, oil exploration brought with it monumental environmental degradation through oil spillages, which affect fishing activities, thereby hampering the major economic means of livelihood in most oil exploration host communities. However, apart from accidental oil spillages which occurs during oil exploration, there are other sources of oil spillages. Examples are ugly practice of cleaning oil tankers on the high sea and dumping the residue in the waters, leakages from ageing oil pipelines, disposal of used oil into the drains by the road side mechanics, oil blow outs from the flow stations, oil spillages due to tanker accidents, and deliberate breaking of oil pipes by militant groups (Raji & Abejide, 2013; Ekpo, Obot, & David, 2018). Meanwhile, several studies which have evaluated instances of oil spillages in the region, with emphasis on the effects on aquatic environment are in concordance in their observation that the gravity of damage is monumental. Some of these studies such as Akpan and Akpabio (2003), Wunder (2003), Nwilo and Badejo (2001, 2005, 2006), Adelana, Adeosun, Adesina, and Ojuroye (2011), Omajemite (2011), Kadafa (2012) or Ekpo *et al.* (2018), indicate that oil spillages severely affect both plants and animals in the estuarine zone, ocean floor, and beaches. The consequence of these is that sea animals are poisoned and killed, thus reducing the quantity available for fishing, and spillages on lands hampers crops and plants farming greatly thereby denying the locals both cash and food crops. The view projected in *Hard Ground* is that oil sales proceeds are mainly used in developing others parts of the country, whereas the locals in and around oil exploration areas are practically neglected.

It is these negative effects of crude oil exploration in Niger Delta communities and the abysmal resource management by the ruling class and government we argue are arguably the reasons for the acceleration of disenchantment propelling the people to identify themselves as collective victims, while they see the Federal Government as the source of their victimization because of the following reasons: the none convincing attempts by the Federal Government towards meticulous provision of result oriented approach to ameliorate the degradation of Niger Delta environment; and little or zero provision of sustainable developmental infrastructures which will represent a clear sign of re-investing significant portion of oil sales proceeds to the Niger Delta. Another factor is the issue of insufficient integration mechanism for people in oil bearing communities to become proper stakeholders.

According the responses we gathered, Niger Delta people see past and current attempts by Federal Government to cushion the effect of their pains as orchestrated attempt to deodorize stinking environment rather than pin-point the sources of the disturbing odor and evacuate it, to achieve an enduring result. It is widely acknowledged that these reasons are behind the disenchantments by the youth like Nimi which have gone beyond just verbal demand for polity restructuring to militant-violent approaches. Therefore, the plausible supposition is that the current approach and ideology of the youth represented in Nimi is in many ways propelled by frustration.

This supposition is in accord with the conceptual inclination of Leonard Berkowitz who in his review of frustration-aggression hypothesis originally propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939), contends that "frustrations generate aggressive inclinations to the degree that they arouse negative affect" (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 59). The growing disenchantments and frustration are instigated by Niger Delta people's believe that they are victim of artful alienation, oppression and repression. The manifestations and circumstances of the Niger Delta people as aptly captured in Yerima's *Hard Ground* are espoused in Berkowitz's conceptualization where he "argues that the blocking of goal-directed activity can create instigation to aggression" (ibid, p. 60). Furthermore, he explains that all "frustrations invariably lead to open attacks on an available target, even when the interference with goal attainment meets the specifications" (ibid, p. 67). Hence "there are many occasions during which the people prevented from obtaining an expected and desired outcome do not exhibit overt aggression" (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 67; Zillmann, 1979; Baron, 1977 & Bandura, 1973), just as the Niger Delta old generation are projected to have done in *Hard Ground*. The clear supposition here is that there are variables that propel the nature of response and behavior of people who feel frustrated; hence "it is clear that a variety of psychological processes can intervene to determine whether a given thwarting will be followed by aggressive acts" (ibid, p. 67). Furthering, it is the view of this scholar that "illegitimately imposed barriers to goal attainment are more likely to produce aggressive responses than are those that seem

to be socially proper, but even the latter can activate an instigation to aggression" (ibid, p. 71). More so, we are inclined to agree with the view that "people are more strongly instigated to attack their frustrater when they think they have been deliberately and wrongly kept from reaching their goal than when they believe the interference has only been accidental, and they may be inclined to inhibit their aggressive reactions when they think the thwarting was socially proper" (ibid, p. 71). Our effort is to clearly assembly information which elaborately indicates were leadership gaps have resulted in the deep disenchantment among Niger Delta people towards the Federal Government as a means of pin-pointing how best polity restructuring as a functional conflict resolution mechanism can secure a lasting peace and fairness.

**Nuances of Demands for Polity Restructuring
and Its Plausible Application for Lasting Conflict Resolution**

It is indicative that the underbelly of the variables to the Niger Delta people's frustration is that "between 1953 and 1960, that is the period of self-government and independence, regions retained 100 per cent of revenues, based on the principle of derivation" and "at independence, the proportion of revenue allocated on the basis of derivation was slashed to 50 per cent" (Ukiwo, 2009, p. 2). More so "from 1970 to 1999, derivation was gradually slashed from 45 per cent to 3 per cent, with the federal government pocketing most of the revenues" and "the 30-year period coincided with the era when oil became the major source of revenue for the country" (ibid, p. 2). The above insight succinctly indicates the beginning of gradual methodological concentration of accruing finances to the federal government coffers and clearly, this signposted the beginning of abysmal quality resource management by the successions of military regimes. Thus, the feeling of the Niger Delta people is that "since oil resources were mostly found in the Niger Delta, which is occupied by minority ethnic groups, the change in the revenue allocation formula was perceived by the Delta ethnic minorities as a ploy orchestrated by three major Nigerian ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) to exploit them (Niger Delta people)" (ibid, p. 2). The simmering embers of vicious disenchantment were exacerbated by successive Military governments' abysmal resource management, thus "between 1984 and 1999, the military governors were appointed by and responsible to the commander-in-chief" thus "they made no pretence of representing the interests of the people of the states they were administering and were more concerned with maintaining law and order at all costs" (ibid, p. 1). The notion here is that the successive military governments' approach to governance "predisposed the non-indigenous governors to work against pan-Delta solidarity" and unambiguously "some of them were perceived as having used divide-and-rule strategies to maintain hegemony" (ibid, p. 1). Hence, the level of insensitivity exhibited by the military governors and their preference for heavy-handed responses to community agitation, which falls within maladministra-

tion in many ways, propelled the youth to embrace militancy to force the hand of the Federal Government.

Thus the Niger Delta conflict blossoms because of the perennial endemic unreliability and mismanagement of resources by Federal Government as portrayed in Nimi's comments. In many ways some of the vexed issues that come to the fore in the conflict between ethnic identities/loyalties and national interest in the play subsumes the fragmentations of meanings to the conflict rhetoric which propels otherness as regards to demands for polity restructuring. In his comments Nimi feels that the repressive approach of the Federal Government should not make him afraid and meek, so also other youths, because his father and mother who belong to the old generation, who remained afraid and meek, are worse off. Though his mother claims that he is naive and dangerously exuberant, Yerima succinctly projects the variables that instigate the shaping of ideologies and inclinations in situations projected in the play. While Nimi represents the youth who embraces violence and militancy as the approach to end the unfavorable condition and victimhood, Mama represents the old generation who adopts tears, cries and solemn waiting, hence she thinks that Nimi is deluded or better still infested by wicked deceitful spirit. To explain a bit our supposition in this regard, we can say that mama's old generation is not as exposed as the Nimi's generation who could apply ideas harvested from electronic public domain and networks to undermine, sabotage, and hurt the perceived oppressor(s) severely even at painful cost.

To place in clear perspective the basis of our further analysis in this segment, let us first see the encapsulation of the demands of the people of Niger Delta as projected through Nimi in following comments.

> The first comment: *The president-General of our movement had said all the great things about our past heroes, the need for us all to come together, and have one voice, and the best formula for the resource control of the revenue generated from our oil. But the one that sent the Governor twitching was when he said true federalism was needed to actualize long and lasting peace in Nigeria* (Yerima 2011, p. 37).

> The second comment: *That was when we all chanted aloud the Kaiama Declaration. 'Cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our people and communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources which were enacted without our participation and consent. Agree to remain within Nigeria [...]' and that 'the best way for Nigeria is a federation of ethnic nationalities'. Come and see the people clapping!* (ibid, p. 38).

In the two comments, the current demands of the Niger Delta people which are true federalism and resource control are projected as the variables influencing their common emotional interest which has continued to generate fervent debates. In the two

comments, Yerima projects the inclinations to the calls for polity restructuring which will help Niger Delta people to regain full resource control. 'Resource control' simply put means allowing resource bearing communities and States to own, control and exploit all resources such as oil and solid minerals in their areas, and contribute an agreed percentage to the Federation Account. Naturally, it is the believe of very many Nigerians based on our field study that States and communities who have more resources are in support of resource control because they will benefit much more, whereas States and communities that have little or no commercially viable resource, presently are against such demands. Thus, Niger Delta people's emotional interest which is propelled by subsisting sense of disadvantage within the current polity structure, see Nigeria's subsisting polity structure and framework as unfair, unjust, destabilizing, dysfunctional and retrogressive. Whereas others (mostly States in northern geo-political zone) who are not oil bearing and are afraid of not being able to sustain their economy if resource control by federating units is enthroned, in their emotional interest contend that the subsisting polity structure and framework is not the problem.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of crude oil exploration in the Niger Delta, Yerima's portrayals of the realities of the impact of crude-oil in the Niger Delta in his play *Hard Ground*, how the brutal impact of crude oil in the Niger Delta has continued to instigate debates and demands for polity restructuring in Nigeria, and the nuances of the debates and demands for polity restructuring in Nigeria. In Yerima's text, there is metaphoric suggestion of the struggle to validate the legitimacy and justification of the armed struggle. In scholarly reports, films, documentaries and creative literary inputs on Niger Delta people's perception of their livelihood in their environment in relation to oil and gas realities and experiences, are filled with tales of agony, dehumanization, brutality and gutter politics. The field studies we carried out for this study, indicate that oil exploration in Niger Delta have brought about monumental degradation of environment with its negative multiplayer effects on health, livelihood, development and fulfillment of people in affected areas. However, we notice that the call for polity restructuring deserves serious and urgent attention because of its propensity to heal the subsisting pain and foster a progressive sense of fairness and justice. Thus, Niger Delta reality is a subsisting conflict which requires a resolution for enduring peace and sustainable progress. The scenario is that holding on to power because of numerical strength by a section of the country will continue to propel disenchantment which means that the country will continue to grapple with violence, uncertainty and insecurity. Nigeria is a democracy and the northern states claim population majority hence they see the possibility of remaining in power, thus the subsisting polity structure apparently is in their favor. However, with the subsisting realities in Niger Delta there is a conflict which requires serious attention.

To change the narrative the Federal Government must begin to develop the oil producing communities through building of commensurate infrastructures and social welfare, enacting of enabling laws that will criminalize none cleaning and regeneration of areas affected by oil spillages, and making of concerted effort at increasing the stake holding of people in communities where oil exploration is going on. Our respondents suggest that poor and visionless leadership stopped the sincere implementation of these policies before the beginning of youth militancy. Now that the militancy has taken root, the policy makers should look towards polity restructuring that will decentralize governance, assets and liabilities through a well constituted national conference. However, our suggestion is that the decentralization needs to be in phases so that the federating units will considerably adapt and evolve into autonomous economic entities.

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North Caucasus:
Promoting Conflict Resolution Strategy
In An Unstable Region

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Abstract: The article is devoted to comparative analysis of contemporary political theories of socio-cultural integration policy as a way of constructive conflict resolution in the North Caucasus. Latent ethno-political conflicts remain the most noticeable of contemporary challenges and threats to civil solidarity and ethnic peace in this unstable region. The fundamental issue that requires a constructive solution in order to ensure political stability in the North Caucasus region is the promotion of multi-level and inclusive sociocultural integration. This study claims that the escalation of protracted, deep-rooted conflicts is the result of large-scale social disintegration as a fundamental threat to the North Caucasus stability. Socio-cultural disintegration is superimposed on ethno-territorial and social polarization: ethno-political particularism, religious traditionalism and large-scale demodernization of the North Caucasus archaize regional identities, hindering the formation of civil society.

Keywords: sociocultural integration policy, conflict resolution strategy, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, the North Caucasus.

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Introduction

Today, the aggravation of cultural conflicts necessitates an integration policy that excludes assimilation and isolationist strategies, reduces ethnic and religious violence, and ensures a high level of civil solidarity. The dramatic events of recent years have demonstrated that destructive cultural conflicts go beyond domestic and regional ones. Peacekeeping becomes an attribute of democracy and global security: regions of ethnic and confessional instability are asso-

ciated with potential actors of international terrorism, which increases political desire to find constructive ways to resolve cultural contradictions. The clash of civilizations is simply a weak retouch on social Darwinism, which driven by interests and prevails in global politics as a result of the unequal global distribution of wealth and power. The image of a culturally divided and, therefore, not fully integrated world obscures the fact that ethnic conflicts at the level of cultural identity cannot be separated from socio-political contradictions.

Protracted ethnic conflict in the North Caucasus is the most destructive in contemporary Russia, and it does not seem that the confrontation is nearing completion. The state fights armed attacks, for which the Chechen separatists initially took responsibility, and nowadays, militants inspired by the ideas of jihad, striking in Moscow, other large cities and many settlements of the North Caucasus. Russia's counterterrorism strategy, based primarily on coercive measures, is not able to eliminate the many causes of the conflict, fueled by ethnic, religious, political and economic contradictions, the overcoming of which requires a flexible and comprehensive solution. Moscow is increasingly aware of the problem and will try new approaches for more effective integration policy of the region, which finally became part of the Russian Empire only in the 19th century and since then has been a serious challenge for Russia. Diversity of ethnic groups and religious movements, different historical experiences and political preferences complicate the task of reducing tension in the region and its integration with the rest of the country. Understanding this diversity is crucial for the political steps and new legislative initiatives that contribute to conflict resolution, rather than further deepening the contradictions.

Contemporary ethnic conflict in the North Caucasus includes a wide range of phenomena and often disguises the unequal distribution of economic or political power, cultural and religious identification, territorial tensions, and historical memory. Historically, ethno-political and ethno-territorial conflicts in the North Caucasus region can be divided into two main categories that "flow" into each other: the first type of deep-rooted conflicts are intra-regional ethno-political and cultural conflicts; the second type is secessionist conflicts between ethnic communities and the federal government. Five fundamentally unresolved ethnic contradictions in the North Caucasus remain potential security threats: 1) latent separatism in Chechnya; 2) Ossetian-Ingush territorial contradictions; 3) the problem of the unity of the Lezgi people in Dagestan and Azerbaijan; 4) the hidden problem of the Karachai and Circassian peoples in the republics of Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria; 5) ethno-territorial tensions in Dagestan.

The rapidly expanding boundaries of social, economic and cultural ties in the process of globalization improve the life chances of some groups and turn out to be destructive for others. Contemporary models of regional integration into global democratic politics are controversial: in the situation of structural demodernization and neo-traditionalization

of regional communities, assimilation models can increase ethno-social instability, creating conditions for the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts. A large-scale tension between ethnic and religious communities within contemporary nation states is today a deep obstacle to civil solidarity and internationalism. Today, the implementation of socio-cultural integration policy is aimed at ensuring political consolidation of multi-cultural communities. Social stability and modernization activity of such communities directly depend on the high level of an inclusive integration policy. Structural factors determine the permanent turbulence of international politics and the fundamental impossibility of solving the problem of ensuring territorial consolidation – maintaining the latter requires macro-political efforts. Ethno-cultural diversity of contemporary nation states predetermine the fact that the territorial and political consolidation presents a serious challenge to the subject of management. In this regard, the study of the anti-conflict, normative-societal potential of the integration policy and the analysis of the adaptation mechanisms of ethnic communities to democratization and modernization are the most relevant in the long-term conflict resolution strategy.

This research aims to analyze how the consolidating potential of socio-cultural integration can affect the strategy for resolving deep-rooted ethnic conflicts in an unstable region. The North Caucasus experience shows that conflict mobilization was due to separatist and secessionist movements in the post-Soviet decades. In a situation of ongoing structural deformation of civil society and the growth of socio-cultural dis-integration, regional ethno-political contradictions can initiate new conflicts: social inequalities, anomie, economic polarization, strengthening ideologies of fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism remain the main reasons for the escalation of violence in the North Caucasus. The paper attempts to answer a key research question that unresolved ethnic conflicts and latent tensions have fundamental consequences for the North Caucasus political stability. The study argues that the potential escalation of deep-rooted conflicts, determined by unresolved ethno-cultural and ethno-political contradictions, is the result of large-scale social disintegration as a fundamental threat to the security of multi-ethnic North Caucasus.

Theoretical debates and conceptual models

The theoretical tradition of socio-cultural integration policy analysis is associated with the conceptual confrontation of ethnic conflict theory, citizenship theory, multiculturalism, neo-functionalism, normative concepts of political integration. The conceptual contradictions lie in the interpretation of socio-cultural integration as a way of resolving ethno-cultural conflicts in pluralistic societies. Conflict resolution theorists rely on the analysis of the conflictogenic nature of mobilized ethnicity; multiculturalists proceed from the normativity of cultural pluralism and hyper-ethnic identification; representatives of the neo-functional paradigm, the theory of citizenship, and normative

concepts of political integration interpret the status of ethnic and cultural groups from the standpoint of political participation, equality of opportunity, and imperative socio-cultural integration. According to J. Fearon and D. Laitin (1996), a full-fledged theory of ethnic conflict should explain why, despite serious tensions, ethnic relations based on peace and integration are more typical than large-scale violence. The North Caucasus ethnic conflicts can be described as intrastate and ethno-political conflicts, based on the desire of one side to separate from the existing state and build a new nation state. Regional separatism is mobilized on the basis of the doctrine and political practice of ethnic nationalism and cultural isolationism. Independence wars or ethno-nationalist conflicts are the most common form of violent conflict and represent the main challenge to socio-cultural integration and ethnic peace in the North Caucasus.

The comprehensive theory of socio-cultural integration seeks to combine the concepts of individual freedom and group loyalty as counter-narratives to forced assimilation. This combination can be seen as a movement towards pluralism and respect for cultural differences at the individual and collective levels. Socio-cultural integration forms communicative mechanisms of civil consolidation based on the principles of equality and justice. Social justice, the creation of a "society for all" is the overarching goal of integration. Justice refers to societal principles and values that allow social actors to receive a fair share of the benefits for a fair share of responsibility in the framework of life together in society. The concepts of social justice define civil society as the most desirable and attainable, provided that rights and obligations are distributed in accordance with the agreed principles of equality. It is an integrated society in which social actors can participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equal rights and opportunities, justice and dignity (Kymlicka, 2007).

The concept of socio-cultural integration policy refers to constructivist categories that are currently widely used in the contemporary politics to describe the idea, the purpose of which is to facilitate the development of a socio-cultural system in which stability, security, tolerance, respect for diversity, equal opportunities, social inclusion are necessary and attributive principles. Socio-cultural integration is defined as the process of creating a stable, safe, fair society based on the principles of social inclusion and protecting human rights, anti-discrimination, tolerance, social equality, cohesion and solidarity (Chapman, 2002). Citizens who participate in political decision-making and feel inclusion in the cultural life of society will be an effective result of the policy of socio-cultural integration. Similarly, the legitimacy of political institutions and structures of democratic society is due to the high degree of cohesion and political participation of individuals and groups in the life of society. According to J. Jenson (1998) and P. Bernard (1999), social cohesion as a normative result of sociocultural integration is based on the conscious and voluntary willingness of people to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve common goals.

The need to stimulate and promote integration policy in multicultural community is determined by normative and instrumental reasons: from an ethical point of view, creating an integrated "society for all" is a self-evident societal goal; structural factors of sociocultural integration policy are associated with the need to reduce cultural and social inequalities that lead to political fragmentation and have a negative impact on conflict prevention. The development of common civil values requires the institutional coordination of antagonistic interests and cultural identities. According to J. Tillie and B. Slijper (2007), there are two fundamental normative concepts of political philosophy that underlie sociocultural integration theory: "democracy" and "statehood". Within the "concept of democracy", the fundamental problem of sociocultural integration policy is related to the discussion of social inequality: the cultural and ethnic minorities are defined as foreigners who must become citizens with the preservation of a unique cultural identity. Within the "concept of statehood", the issue of socio-cultural integration policy is solved from the point of view of constructing the civic identity of migrants, who ultimately should become compatriots, members of the political community.

These basic dimensions of socio-cultural integration policy can be divided into "minimalist" and "maximalist" concepts of democracy and statehood. In the minimalist concept of democracy, the main result of an effective integration policy is the existence of equal civil, social and political rights. This concept is associated with the political philosophy of classical liberalism with the idea that the role of the state in the realization of social equality is limited to the realization of equality of opportunity. The maximalist concept of democracy refers to the political discourse of the "new left" and the theory of social liberalism, according to which equality of opportunity is too limited: "real" equality for cultural and ethnic minorities means that their values, interests and identities are equally taken into account in the political arena. The difference between the minimalist and maximalist concepts of statehood is based on different concepts of the nation. In the minimalist concept of statehood, a nation is perceived as a "moral community". The main result of socio-cultural integration policy is the minimization of social differences between the majority and ethnic minorities, which must adopt the procedures and norms of constitutional democracy, basic civil identity, specific to a particular political community and incorporating the values of "societal culture". This concept is associated with the political philosophy of communitarianism. In the maximalist concept of statehood, the nation is interpreted in the perspective of republicanism, where cultural differences and ethnic identities are leveled based on the priority of "political loyalty". This concept is associated with the political philosophy of neo-republicanism (Vermeulen & Slijper, 2002). According to Tillie and Slijper (2007, p. 39), these theoretical differences lead to four concepts of the sociocultural integration policy: 1) social inclusion; 2) political participation; 3) acculturation; 4) assimilation. Although at the normative level there are "tensions" between these four concepts, they emphasize that "they are not empirically mutually

exclusive": for example, "formal integration" is not an opposition to "participatory integration", but rather its prerequisite.

Socio-cultural integration policy has a normative goal of social cohesion and inclusion, implying equal opportunities and rights for all social actors. Social system becomes more integrated, which implies equality and improved life strategies. The civil identity, social and cultural capital that underlie social cohesion are components of socio-cultural integration, as are the democratic institutions and pluralistic values that modern society is based on. Critics of socio-cultural integration draw attention to its potential negative consequences, which conjure up a repressive image of assimilation policy and imposed cultural uniformity. Integration problems belong to the class of policy tasks that Chapman (2002) described as a "disorder policy," characterized by the absence of a clear agreement on how to solve the problems of cultural consolidation, uncertainty as to what methods sociocultural integration can be effectively implemented without time and resource constraints.

The contradictory combination of integration and disintegration trends of regional development marks the beginning of the 21st century. Taken together, these trends provide the foundation for system integration. The definition of socio-cultural integration in the categories of system integration is associated with the works of Lockwood (1956), who drew attention to the need for a theoretical synthesis of alternative paradigms – normative theories of neo-functionalism of the 1950s and the theory of conflict of Coser and Dahrendorf. According to Rex (1995), the problems of resolving ethnic conflicts and the political integration of cultural minorities generate state responses in the form of ideology and practice of multiculturalism. Rex reveals neoconservative and neoliberal responses to the "demographic presence" of cultural minorities: 1) Complete exclusion of cultural minorities from the social and political sphere, the refusal to grant citizenship and the return of minorities to their countries of origin. 2) Isolation of minorities and non-recognition of the cultural differentness, when citizenship is granted in the process of naturalization. 3) Massive support for labor migrants and their children as temporary residents who are not eligible for citizenship. 4) Promotion of various forms of multiculturalism policy: a) recognition of cultural minorities at the state level as part of the institutional structure; b) the creation of a new "hybrid culture" with autonomy for minorities based on the priority of individual rights, while no ethnic group is privileged over another (Rex, 1995).

The political participation of ethnic and cultural groups belongs to one of four basic dimensions of integration policy, along with: 1) The rights granted to migrants by the host community; 2) Personal and group identification with the host community; 3) Social inclusion, the adoption of democratic norms and civil values as a necessary condition for positive integration (Martiniello 2005; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). According to Zapata-Barrero and Gropas (2012), integration policy involves the imperative par-

ticipation of citizens in political life, which is central to democratic governance for the following reasons: firstly, participation in political life offers people the opportunity to influence the outcomes of decision-making processes (they can protect their interests or the interests of the cultural groups to which they belong); secondly, political participation has a systemic function of "political socialization" in terms of enhancing a sense of citizenship and the formation of a common identity. Both of these aspects are crucial for resolving regional conflicts, socio-cultural cohesion and the dynamic development of democracies characterized by cultural and ethnic diversity.

In macro sociological theory, the main source of integration/disintegration of developed capitalist societies is the class system. In accordance with M. Weber's ideas about social stratification, the development of status systems is likely to lead to political solidarity and harmonious forms of integration, while class societies generate conflicting forms of disintegration. The modern theory of transformations tries to consider socio-cultural integration through a systemic prism: Lockwood (1956) notes that conflict theorists emphasize political conflict as the main engine of social change, while normative functionalists downplay the role of political actors and seek to emphasize functional or dysfunctional relationships between social institutes. For Lockwood, the task of integration theory is to overcome this theoretical dualism.

The basis of research discussion on the problems of contemporary integration policy is the question of the nature of the relationship between the level of migrant participation in the political life of host communities and their homeland. According to Huntington (2004), the maintenance by migrants of relations with countries of origin and the particular identities of ethnic enclaves prevents full assimilation and political integration into the mainstream community. Morawska (2003) casts doubt on the idea that transnational practices and integration are opposite and mutually exclusive processes. According to Kivisto and Feist (2010), the policy of socio-cultural integration is characterized by a relationship between assimilation and transnationalism. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) note how transnationalism provides an alternative resource for promoting integration and social mobility in host communities, as transnational practices create skills that migrants can use in destination countries. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) talk about the false dichotomy between assimilation and transnationalism in modern integration policy and believes that transnational practices contribute to de-escalation of ethical tension and strengthen sociocultural integration, as they generate professional skills that can be useful for the political participation of migrants (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

A key issue of contemporary integration theories concerns the relationship between the political participation of migrants and political consolidation. Socio-cultural integration of migrants is related to the macro-political factors: firstly, group identification with the political system; secondly, active migrant participation in political life through

voting or participation in the public sphere; thirdly, the realization that the authorities hear them. The effectiveness of integration and participation in the political process depends on the country of origin and the host country, the personal qualities of migrants, changes in the structure of political opportunities that arise in the host community (Zapata-Barrero & Gropas, 2012). Within the concept of cultural citizenship, civil integration is an "inventory of opportunities" and a "tool for regulating everyday life". Socio-cultural integration policy becomes an instrument of cultural liberalization and a path of promoting civil unity and cultural diversity in a pluralistic society in a way that does not concentrate personal and group self-awareness on their own "otherness", but position the "other" as a full-fledged a bearer of civil identity, politically motivated and socially inclusive, making an individual contribution to the cultural and political life of society (Stone, Destrempes, Foote, & Jeannotte, 2008, p. 106).

Paris (2004) conducted a political analysis of the consequences of peacekeeping missions launched between 1989 and 1998 and noted that peacekeepers in the 1990s underestimated the destabilizing effects of democratization and liberalization in post-conflict countries that recently completed ethno-religious and civil wars. Despite support for the transformation of crisis and unstable states into liberal market democracies, Paris proposes a new integration model "institutionalization before liberalization" based on the following principles: 1) delay in the large-scale implementation of democratic and market reforms until a rudimentary network of national institutions capable of effectively managing liberalization processes is created; 2) rationalization of liberalization processes in combination with the implementation of democratic values, the construction of civil identities, the construction of social and government institutions that manage political and economic reforms (Paris, 2004, p. 8).

Kymlicka suggests that the accelerated and revolutionary introduction of neoliberal politics and the integration model of multiculturalism ("interculturalism", "diversity policy") in a non-democratic society can carry conflicting risks and threats of destabilization. He notes that liberal multiculturalism is easier to accept where liberal democracy is already well known and where the rule of law and human rights are protected. In countries where the basic values and principles of liberal democracy are not yet integrated into the social system and collective identification, it becomes necessary to slow down the process of democratization until the integration model of liberal multiculturalism is fully implemented. Despite the fact that the integration policy of multiculturalism brings political freedom, social equality and democracy, Kymlicka (2007) encourages to understand the socio-cultural context of integration – minority rights, cultural values, and self-identity of ethnic groups.

Morales and Morariu (2011) point out that not only the political structures, but also the structures of discursive opportunities in the host countries are a decisive factor in an effective integration policy: this is a regional policy regarding migrant associations;

openness of government bodies and formal institutions; local government configuration; the predominant migratory discourse. According to Fennema and Tillie (1999), access to naturalization makes it possible to vote and stand for election: citizenship has been repeatedly defined as a fundamental indicator of sociocultural integration in democratic societies. After naturalization, citizens can expand their political inclusion by voting, through which groups of migrants become a political community and, thus, can change the political system with elected representatives.

In multi-ethnic North Caucasus, the formation of civil identity that consolidates a divided society and forms stable ties between autonomous sociocultural groups is of paramount importance for overcoming ethnic conflicts: socio-cultural integration creates conditions for the reduction of "unrealistic" identity-based conflicts and their transformation into institutional "realistic" conflicts of interest. The likelihood of overcoming ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus depends on a conscious civil position voluntarily accepted by the majority of the regional community, and not only the legal status of a person in civil society is significant, but also on the ability to consolidate by means of ethnic cooperation and cultural dialogue. Sustainable development of the North Caucasus region occurs in the context of traditionalist resistance to Russian modernization processes, permanent ethno-social and ethno-political tensions that flow into protracted conflicts and ethnic wars. Regional conflicts, determined by confrontations between traditionalization and modernization, destroy the integrative basis of large-scale civil identity. Ethno-political processes in the North Caucasus in the first decade of the 21st century changed the nature of threats compared to the beginning and mid-1990s. At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a de-escalation of armed ethno-political conflicts, however, radical ethno-nationalism, which intensifies terrorist activity, testifies to the institutional degradation of civil culture and the destabilization of democratic processes in this region.

Socio-cultural integration policy
as conflict resolution strategy in multi-ethnic region

Ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus are conflicts caused by a long history of hatred and resentment. Historical memory and cultural background in regional conflicts do not work automatically. They are updated as a result of errors by the federal center and local authorities in the implementation of integration policy in the South of Russia since 1991, as well as unprofessional management in the field of interethnic relations, and nation-building. The protracted ethnic conflicts are clearly complex in their historical nature, and the elites into ethnic intolerance transform everything related to cultural-historical causes. Of all the possible options for federalization by the political elite of modern Russia, the most conflicting principle of "national-territorial construction" was chosen. The historical experience of the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia allows to characterize this principle as the leading factor in ethnic conflicts in the North

Caucasus. When implementing the model of the national-territorial federation, ethnic groups and their identities are artificially opposed to each other. The consequence of ethno-territorial federalism is the problem of ethno-social inequality. In the North Caucasus, ethnic hierarchy is assessed as the defining ethno-political attribute of inequality and exclusion of "others". The principle of ethno-national federalism produced by the elite hinders the modernization of the North Caucasus, mythologizes the mass consciousness, and forms a hierarchical inequality of ethnic groups.

Historically, the North Caucasus is the most important geo-strategic macro-region that forms the southern geopolitical border of Russia. In the macro-social perspective, the North Caucasus region becomes a key factor in the macro-social stability and political integration of all of Russia. Russia's connection with Transcaucasia and, as a result, its ability to exert geopolitical influence on the three independent republics of the region largely depend on stability in the North Caucasus. The bloody war in Chechnya showed the vulnerability of the North Caucasus in the issues of effective counteraction to ethnic separatism and fundamentalism. In addition, numerous ethno-political conflicts in the region highlighted the fundamental problem of maintaining the territorial integrity of modern Russia. Latent and potential ethno-political conflicts are the most noticeable of the modern challenges and threats to civil and ethnic peace in the North Caucasus region. Today, the fundamental problem that requires a constructive solution in order to ensure political stability in the region is the promotion of multi-level socio-cultural integration. The prospects for sustainable peace in the North Caucasus seem vague if the integration potential of democratic institutions and constructive approaches to resolving deep-rooted ethnic contradictions are not used.

By the mid-2000s, the resistance movement in the North Caucasus became religiously motivated and acquired the scale of a regional branch of the global militant Islamist movement. Today, North Caucasian rebels identify with the global Ummah, the global community of Muslims, and the most important element of their current ideology is radical Islamism. It is clear that supporters of international jihad would not have had support in Russia if they had not received financial assistance from abroad. The issue of financing is a key one in the framework of the development of Islamic fundamentalism in Russia, since people who preach this idea on their own are often limited in financial capabilities and are outlawed. To support them, international Islamic foundations and organizations allocate colossal amounts. The contemporary North Caucasus is different from the ethnic resistance movement of the "Dudaev era." Ethnic separatism was replaced by religious fundamentalism, the support of radical Islamism and the so-called "defensive jihad," which seeks to expel the "infidels" from the "Muslim lands". Social disintegration, large-scale escalation of ethno-religious violence and the collapse of civil society in the North Caucasus region are becoming a serious problem for Russia, which is experiencing a new era of political transit.

The implementation of the integration policy at the regional level is aimed at ensuring civil meta-ethnic consolidation of multi-ethnic and multicultural communities. The stability and modernization activity of the Russian regions directly depends on the scale of integration policy. The North Caucasus, as one of the most unstable Russian regions, becomes one of the main objects of integration processes. In this regard, the study of the anti-conflict, normative-societal, and inclusive potential of the integration policy as well as political analysis of the adaptation mechanisms of ethno-regional communities to the conditions of democratic modernization are the most relevant in the long-term national policy strategy.

Socio-cultural integration policy as constructive conflict resolution strategy in multi-cultural North Caucasus requires not only special sensitivity to the cultural context and ethnicity, but also requires a high degree of rationalization and confidence in the need to intervene in the ethnic sphere in order to transform it and post-conflict transformation. The motives for the participation of ethnic groups in identity conflicts will largely affect the prospects for their outcome; in order to satisfy their material interests, people are unlikely to consciously risk their lives. In conflicts of identities, the participation of the parties has a pronounced character of sacrifice, and not an inevitable risk: the willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of identification and value ideals is emotionally experienced, realized and verbalized by the parties to the conflicts. Ethnic tension escalates when an ethnocultural group tends to perceive itself as a "victim" of value claims from "other" groups. According to Rothman and Alberstein (2013), if we want to succeed in researching the causes of identity-based conflicts, we must start with a definition that will lead to constructive conflict resolution methods. We consider identity as a self-perception filled with a cultural formula. Cultural formula is based on internal needs and preferences, group characteristics and collective values".

Cultural identity can be personal, group, or intergroup, but it is always a source of perception of a contradiction and a catalyst for conflict. Parties can perceive themselves as "personal maximizers" (J. Rothman), protecting individual values, pursuing their own interests and expressing individualistic needs; they can be socio-cultural groups and feel part of a collective whole; they may feel themselves to be carriers of multiple identities and enter into conflict at the intergroup level, but all these perceptions are generated by the "cultural formula", identity. Cultural identity becomes the "ideological base" of the parties to the conflict, filled with personal, group and intergroup emotions, values and meanings (Rothman & Alberstein, 2013). Cultural conflict has its own unique characteristics, and in different contexts, some of these elements will be more visible than others, but they are all common denominators of conflict genesis. The primordialist approach helps explain the conflictogenic nature of ethnic identity. The concept of political entrepreneurs explains how institutional factors and ethnic stereotypes interact. Ethnicity embodies an element of powerful emotional tension that can be re-politicized

and reactivated if groups recognize the threat to cultural identity, values, and security, which leads to ethnification, escalation of ethnic intolerance, and ultimately violent ethnic conflict (Blagojevic, 2009; Horowitz, 1985). The specificity of cultural conflicts lies in the fact that they proceed against the backdrop of a clash of competing collective values and cultural identities. The concept of "value contradictions" clarifies the concept of cultural conflict as a conflict of identities, emphasizing the systemic and genetic nature of this explanatory model. According to J. Esteban, L. Mayoral, and D. Rey (2012), intra-state conflicts acquire a pronounced ethnic character. More than half of civil conflicts after World War II are classified as ethnic or religious. One of the grounds for classifying a regional ethnic conflict is its identification as an anti-state rebellion on behalf of an ethnic group. Brubaker and Laitin (1998), examining the history of intra-state conflicts of the second half of the 20th century, concluded that the bipolar ideological axis disappeared against the backdrop of large-scale ethnicization of violent clashes.

For the first time, the term "identity-based conflict" appears in the works of J. Burton and J. Rothman in the 1990s. Burton (1996) considers cultural identity as one of the basic human needs, while the threat of identity is perceived by the group as one of the main threats to their security. J. Burton identifies two needs as key: the need for identity and the need for security. According to Rothman (1997), the most important attributes of identity-based conflicts are their irrationality, subjectivity and uncontrollability. Analyzing the status of ethnicity in the dynamics of cultural conflicts, it is necessary to point out the connection of group identities with the primordial values of traditional societies, in which civil identity and individualism do not play a significant role. According to Rothman and Alberstein (2013), when conflict mediators deal with ethno-religious clashes, appeal to individual interests is not able to smooth out the crack that arose as a result of the conflict; attempts to manipulate groups can lead to an intensification of the conflict of identities.

The specificity of identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus is caused by the deep contradiction between static (ethno-religious traditionalization) and dynamic (rational-secular modernization) processes and lies in the mobilization of radical identities. Ethnic hierarchy as a factor in identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus becomes the source of the formation of neotraditionalist projects of religious fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism. Transformation and modernization processes in the region are developing asymmetrically, which strengthens ethnic conflicts. The following determinants of the conflict potential of interethnic relations of the North Caucasus region and the dynamics of regional conflicts can be distinguished: 1. High level of ethnic mosaic of the population. 2. External migration. Significant differences in the culture (including the value system) of new migrants and the local population lead to tensions. There are known cases of "encapsulation" of migrant Diasporas, when a group of migrants closes in themselves, perceiving the old-timed population as hostile. 3. Intraregional migration. Intensive migration processes are taking place in the region itself. The out-

flow of Russians from the republics of the North Caucasus continues. Those Russians who remained in their former places of residence are under intense pressure from both objective circumstances and local radicals. Migrants of a different ethnicity cause concern of the local population, which increases sharply in case of the arrival of large groups of foreign ethnic migrants. 4. The difficulties of modernization. Socio-economic development, the development of new technologies and cultural changes are not balanced in different spheres of life and among different peoples. 5. Negative historical memory. The wars between the Caucasian peoples, the memory of the Caucasian War and relatively recent recollections of the deportations of peoples serve as a psychological justification for aggression. 6. Revitalization of religious fundamentalism. It is in the south of Russia that the main centers of Salafism (Wahhabism) are located. Salafism is politicized form of Islam, which is used for its own purposes by terrorists and ethno-national radicals. Religious and ethno-political identities perform various functions in the course of an ethnic conflict. Ethno-political identity is intended to unite "their own" in the interests of the ethnic elite, which decided to expand its influence and capabilities. Islamic fundamentalism provides support to radical movements from other ethnic groups in Russia and abroad. 7. The lack of a developed civil society and traditions of partnerships between the government and public associations. The conservatism of the region's population is manifested in the conservatism of deputies and officials. The "third sector", which can play an important role, especially at the stage of conflict prevention and post-conflict settlement, is poorly included in peacekeeping.

All of these issues would merit further analysis though complementary methodologies offering a more independent perspective on ethno-regional conflict dynamics. In particular, the findings gathered here call for more in-depth research on the boundaries between sociocultural integration policy – conflict resolution strategies and different forms of ethnic conflicts; on the internal dynamics and decision-making involved in shifting goals and strategies; and on their various implications for the processes of ethno-religious radicalization and political instability. There also needs to be more interdisciplinary investigation on the linkages between conflict management strategy, social cohesion, political integration, negotiations, democratic transitions, and post-conflict institutionalization. Finally, such analysis might offer useful lessons for constructive international engagement to support the conversion of state challengers into active peace-builders, as long as these actors are politically motivated movements, which enjoy strong social legitimacy and aspire to take part in democratic politics. Indeed, the findings call for a rethinking of conventional intervention in cultural conflicts, promoting the social cohesion and sociocultural integration policy during negotiations; offering assistance to support democratic transitions in multicultural communities that possess a future role within a peaceful environment, in contrast to criminalization strategies (e.g. through anti-terrorist measures such as proscription and counter-insurgency) which prevent ethnic groups from expanding their civil capacities.

Conclusions

Today, apolitical strategy for resolving deep-rooted ethnic conflicts, based on sociocultural integration, is a highly effective resource for peacebuilding and peacekeeping in the North Caucasus. Multi-level model of sociocultural integration must serve as the main preventive method for managing and resolving ethnic conflicts in an unstable region. Socio-cultural integration policy as conflict resolution strategy in a multi-ethnic region creates constructive conditions for social balance between competing and conflicting cultural, religious and ethnic groups. The North Caucasus conflict resolution strategy must not be based on assimilation policy and the suppression of ethnic identities and cultural differences, but on the principles of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, constructive pacifism, political participation, social inclusion, ethnic tolerance, and civil peace. Promotion of peacebuilding and peacekeeping measures for constructive conflict resolution in the North Caucasus is closely linked with an inclusive integration policy and the elimination of large-scale ethno-social inequalities.

When discussing the anti-conflict mechanisms of the socio-cultural integration policy in the North Caucasus, the following should be taken into account: firstly, integration is a macro-political project, the content of which is largely determined by the problems of ensuring regional and national security of Russia; secondly, the development of the North Caucasus macro-region after the end of armed conflicts shows the inadmissibility of an orientation toward ethno-nationalism, religious fundamentalism, cultural isolationism and political autarchy of ethnic communities within nation states. The main factor determining the severity of ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus is social fragmentation and sociocultural disintegration. If there is a single economic center of the country, where most of the finance is pumped, internal integration functions are violated in the "center-periphery" relationship. Socio-cultural disintegration is superimposed on territorial polarization: ethnic particularism (privatism), religious traditionalism and large-scale demodernization of the North Caucasus archaize regional identities, hindering the formation of civil society.

Socio-cultural integration policy has a normative goal of social cohesion and inclusion, implying equal opportunities and rights for all social actors. The civil identity, social and cultural capital that underlie social cohesion are components of socio-cultural integration policy, as are the democratic institutions and pluralistic values that modern society is based on. The need to stimulate and promote integration policy in multicultural community is determined by normative ethical and instrumental reasons: from an ethical point of view, creating an integrated "society for all" is a self-evident societal goal; structural factors of sociocultural integration policy are associated with the need to reduce ethnic tensions and social inequalities that lead to political fragmentation and have a negative impact on conflict management. Cultural conflicts are the consequences of the radicalization of social inequalities and politicized hyper-ethnicity. Socio-cultural

integration, which is associated with a high level of civil and political solidarity, a weakening of ethnic mobilization, and a reduction in the negative stereotyping of "others" as "cultural enemies", can substantially reduce ethnic tensions.

Comparative conceptual analysis allows to explicate the basic determinants of an inclusive model of socio-cultural integration: 1) The higher the degree of integration and solidarity in society, the higher will be the state support in such areas as education, health insurance, social programs. 2) The higher the degree of cohesion and solidarity, the more stringent will be the observance of social norms, social loyalty, support for civic institutions and democratic values such as social trust, moral responsibility, political consolidation, human rights, tolerance, and compromise. 3) Social institutions based on inclusive civic values make group collaboration reflective, rational, politically and ethically necessary. 4) A higher level of political participation increases the level of consolidation, which not only promotes integration, but also increases social capital. Socio-cultural integration policy seeks to create optimal conditions for conflict-free interaction, the balance between ethnic groups. Socio-cultural integration policy acts as a form of organization of a multi-ethnic society in the field of plural civil identity, aimed at the achievement of social justice and providing types and methods of political activity aimed at overcoming and resolving cultural conflicts. Therefore, socio-cultural integration policy in the conceptual plan is the desire to include opponent parties of identity-based conflicts in a certain logic of relationships and to combine their efforts to solve common problems and achieve a common goal.

The anti-conflict potential of sociocultural integration policy in the North Caucasus contributes to the "civilizing of ethnic conflicts" through the implementation of new conceptual approaches to the transformation of these conflicts based on "constructive pacifism" (Senghaas, 2004). While anti-militarism and pacifism seek to destroy the structures and mentality that are the causes of aggression, violence and war, sociocultural integration is aimed at creating structures of mentality that contribute to lasting peace. Socio-cultural integration policy can be called "constructive pacifism," that is linked with the construction and architecture of a multi-ethnic society. Civilization of conflict is the exclusion of the means of violence in the course of resolving ethnic conflicts, the development of a wide range of non-violent ways to conflict resolution. In contemporary conflict theory, the term "civilization of conflict" refers to the process of transformation of the nature of cultural conflict, that is, the replacement of violent means of solving problems with non-violent ones. The development of pacifist opportunities for conflict resolution strategy in the North Caucasus is closely linked with socio-cultural integration policy and the elimination of social inequality between ethnic groups.

Successful integration of the North Caucasus into the Russian state is of key importance for security and healthy international relations in the country. The spread of the conflict from Chechnya to neighboring regions, a large number of victims among the

civilian population, military personnel and militants, as well as a sharp aggravation of interethnic relations throughout the country, all this indicates that Moscow needs to find new, more effective approaches to addressing the main causes of armed conflict. In Chechnya, despite impressive successes in the post-war reconstruction, the problems of creating a transparent system of public administration, political pluralism, ensuring the rule of law and respect for women's rights are still very acute. Monitoring the spending of funds allocated for the restoration of cities, infrastructure and the economy of the republic as a whole is crucial to prevent further growth of tension between the North Caucasians and Russian nationalists.

Across the North Caucasus, unresolved interethnic conflicts and frictions, territorial and land disputes, unanswered old and new demands articulated by ethno-national movements create fertile ground for religious radicalism and fuel the underground. This paper provides a brief analysis of the main issues related to an integration policy and multi-ethnicity. Their solution will eliminate many of the deep-rooted causes of potential armed conflicts. To form a new integration policy in the North Caucasus, it is necessary to conduct a thorough study of the existing interethnic contradictions based on fieldwork in the region. The state should constantly monitor hotbeds of tension and ensure equal access to power and employment, including in local law enforcement agencies, especially in unstable, ethnically mixed regions.

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Afghanistan:
US-Taliban Peace Talks: CPEC Perspective

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Abstract: The US policy makers attempted the political settlement of the Afghan conflict for the first time in 2011. This study finds the US policy shift in 2017 along with the strain of the conflict on the US economy, rise of ISKP and the war fatigue among the Taliban fighters have enabled the success of US Taliban negotiations. Now that a tentative Peace Agreement has been signed between the two parties, a more complex phase of intra Afghan dialogue has begun. USA, China and Pakistan have extended their support for all Afghan stakeholders to engage in a meaningful dialogue for a political settlement of the conflict. Both China and Pakistan desire the extension of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan. The paperanalyzed the Afghan Peace Talks with reference to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The motivation and incentives for CPEC incase of successful peace negotiations are be discussed in detail .

Keywords: US, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Taliban, Peace Talks, CPEC.

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1. Introduction

Afghanistan is referred to as the graveyard of empires. World powers have a history of trying to invade the region but without any success. From the Macedonian conqueror Alexander to the British Empire in the nineteenth century to the Soviets in the 1980s to finally the Americans in 2001, no outside intervention has ever succeeded

in Afghanistan. The unique geopolitical positioning of the country has rendered it a "playground of empires". The Great Game between the Soviets and the British in the 19th century and then the rivalry between the superpowers USA and USSR and once again the ambitions of USA made it a host for the invading forces. Though each time the invaders had to swallow the tough pills of defeat. In modern history three times the world powers tried to assume control over Afghanistan and failed miserably (Norland, 2017). Afghanistan links Central Asia to Middle East and South and Southeast Asia. This strategic linkage served as a primary motivation for invading foreign powers in order to advance their own political agenda. The British remained active in the country from 1839 to 1919, three wars were fought though in the end the British suffered major loss of human lives along with lack of resources to pursue their campaign in the aftermath of first world war forced them to abandon their ambitions in Afghanistan. The Soviets, on the other hand, desired to bring Afghanistan under their influence, however the Jihadists with their guerilla warfare and strategic, logistic and financial help from USA triumphed and the USSR not only suffered defeat but also disintegrated. Then the first-ever war of the 21st century, the US-led War on Terror. This war has cost USA trillions of dollars and is also called America's longest war pushing behind the Vietnam War. Currently the Trump administration is engaged in talks with the Taliban to finally bring an end to this misadventure and cease the constant embarrassment. The reasons behind the inability of foreign powers in maintaining control over the country range from the extremely challenging terrain of the region to the other foreign players who play their own agendas for the country. The mountainous terrain makes the navigation and the movement of personnel and equipment a constant hurdle. This kind of geography is favorable for the guerilla's forces that are familiar with the region and understand its geography while the security forces equipped with modern and advanced weaponry and technology struggle for their survival. Another factor ignored is the complex tribal system and the diverse ethnic groups with their complicated relations among each other and its impact and how its lack of understanding affects the foreign forces (Little, 2017). This paper is divided into three parts, the first part will particularly focus on the current scenario and analyze the resurgence of the Taliban, and the presence of Islamic State Khorasan Province. The second part will focus on the need to end this war and the role peace talks in reaching a peace settlement. The third part will address the Afghan peace talks and their relevance for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Looking into the Afghan war from the perspective of CPEC is crucial since it will provide a unique outlook into the entire conflict and how to resolve it.

2. USA-Taliban peace talks

2.1. Taliban in Power

The literal meaning of the word Taliban is "seeker of knowledge", the term *Talib* is generally referred to a "*Madrassah* Student". The second meaning has its roots in the

background of Mullah Omar the group's founder and leader who studied at a *Madrassah* in Pakistan. It is necessary to differentiate between the mujahedeen of the Soviet war from the Taliban. Though a number of Taliban were mujahedeen and fought against the Soviets, this group in their goal and characteristics is different from the jihadists and mujahedeen. Along with Afghans citizens of other Muslim nations took part in the Afghan war and became mujahedeen. The original Taliban, in fact, was made up of the Pashto speaking faction of the mujahedeen (Nojumi, 2009).

After the fall of Kabul, a Civil War among the various mujahedeen groups erupted. The Civil War continued however in 1994 Taliban entered into the fight and at first controlled Kandahar and manage to control Kabul in 1996 ending the four-year civil war. Former President Najibullah was hanged and Osama Bin Laden returned to Afghanistan during this time. Taliban controlled ninety percent of the entire country and managed to eliminate and weaken most of their opposition (Bajoria, 2011). Though predominantly *Pakhtun Taliban's* were an inclusive group where all ethnicities were allowed to fight and the common thread that tied the organization together was its Islamic ideology. The public opinion on the Taliban regime was quite positive since the public was left frustrated and devastated by the Soviet War and then the civil war among the Warlords. Corruption in the government ranks and instability was evident (Khan & Khalid, 2018). The Taliban believed that in order to maintain a stable Afghan state all the armed factions need be disarmed. They faced administrative and financial troubles however they had managed to resume complete monopoly over the use of power.

2.2. Taliban versus US interests

The US intervention in Afghanistan was the result of the Taliban's provision of safe haven to Al Qaeda. Afghan Taliban only operate within the territory of Afghanistan.

2.3. 9/11 Attacks and the role of Taliban

The 21st century is known as the American Century and the first war of this century is the US-led War on Terror. The attack on world trade center formed the basis of the "War on Terror" and brought Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism as the main foes of humanity for the next decade. The mastermind of the 9/11 attacks was Osama Bin Laden, most well-known mujahed of the Afghan war. During the Soviet War Bin Laden and other Mujahedeen were supported financially and logistically by the USA and West. Though after the Soviet withdrawal Bin Laden left Afghanistan and returned to Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden's reputation as a hero in the Islamic world made him a threat to the Saudi royal family (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). Bin Laden actively preached against the US presence in Muslim countries. After expulsion from Saudi Arabia Bin Laden took asylum in Afghanistan. In 1998, US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, Dar us Salam and Tanzania were simultaneously bombed by Al-Qaida and as a result 224 people lost their

lives. In response to this US conducted cruise missile strikes in Afghanistan at possible Bin Laden hideouts (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

On September 11[th,] 2001, nineteen terrorists hijacked four East Coast flights. A total of 2,977 people were killed in the entire operation (History Channel, 2019). On September 20th President Bush made a speech in Congress and declared "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated" (History Channel, 2018).

On September 25th, the 'Operation Enduring Freedom' was announced by the US defense secretary. Evidence gathered by the US evicted Al Qaeda of the attack and the US demanded his handover from the Taliban regime. Initially Taliban leader Mullah Omar rejected any demands of handing over Bin Laden however after the airstrikes began the Taliban offered to hand over Bin Laden to a third neutral country if US provided evidence. The US administration rejected any negotiations or compromise in their demand of handing over Osama Bin Laden, his companions and any hostages they hold over. It was reiterated that the airstrikes will not cease until the demands were met (The Guardian, 2001).

Taliban explicitly had no role in 9/11 moreover Afghanistan was among the first countries to condemn the attack, their only fault was allowing safe haven to Bin Laden and his cohorts. Taliban suggested various methods to resolve the issue, one of the proposals was to try Bin Laden at a three-nation court under the supervision of Organization of Islamic Conference. USA at that time had not recognized the Taliban regime, no diplomatic ties existed between the two and hence Taliban opined that no extradition agreement existed between US and Afghanistan. The US did not trust the Taliban regime and considered it a ploy (Mashal, 2011). Taliban's persistent support to the terrorist group had cost them their ties with Saudi Arabia one of the only three countries that had diplomatic ties with the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan. Furthermore certain Taliban factions were irritated by Bin Laden's continued declarations and actions against the US namely the 1998 embassy attacks (Bacon, 2018).

2.4. US attacks Afghanistan

US's military campaign in Afghanistan was known as 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. Prior to the beginning of the military exercise extradition of Bin Laden and his companions was demanded by the Bush administrations and severe consequences were threatened in case the Taliban failed to comply (Hassan, 2017)Bush administration aimed to not only capture Bin Laden but install a government that would be friendly to the US and refrains from harboring any terrorists on its soil (Katzman, 2017).

By October 2001 around 1000 marines were deployed in Qandahar, Taliban administration was unable to sustain their control under such conditions, in December 2001

Northern Alliance forces captured Kabul and the Taliban regime officially lost control over Afghanistan. Mullah Omar who stayed in Qandahar throughout his career as the supreme leader fled the city after Kabul fell. The overarching goal throughout the campaign remained of capturing Bin Laden (CFR, 2016). By 2003 the Bush administration had declared an end to the combat mission in Afghanistan and announced that the focus would be on nation-building. According to President Bush it was "mission accomplished" in Afghanistan. Now the allies focused on stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan (Khan, 2019).

At this point around 8,000 US soldiers were present in Afghanistan. By this time the Bush administration's focus had shifted from Afghanistan to the Iraq war. For the Americans the combat part of the war was over and Afghanistan no longer became the priority agenda for the US administration. Taliban re-organized and made a comeback in 2006. A new wave of insurgency-hit the Southern regions of Afghanistan. There were 136 suicide attacks in 2006 while the figure was only 27 in the previous year. Following the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 there was a respite in violence, US and international forces failed to take advantage of the situation, as a result, the insurgents reassembled and began operations in east and south of Afghanistan. Armed attacks went from 1,558 in 2005 to 4,542 in 2006. By 2009, President Barack Obama was elected to the office and he pledged seventeen thousand more troops to Afghanistan. By this time the total number of troops deployed in the country reached thirty seven thousand. The focus remained on quelling the resurgence in violence. In 2010 NATO members decided on a timetable to handover the security control to the Afghan forces set to begin in 2011 with complete withdrawal in 2014 (Malik, 2018).

 In 2011 Osama Bin Laden was finally killed in an operation carried out by the US forces in Pakistan's city of Abbottabad. The main aim of invading Afghanistan had been accomplished. The number of US troops in Afghanistan gradually lowered and the transition phase began. During 2014 ISAF handed over the control of around 800 bases to Afghan security forces along with the control of 'Provincial Reconstruction Forces. In 2015, only 9,800 troops remained in Afghanistan and the 'Operation Enduring Freedom' concluded and 'Operation Resolute Support' (ORS) began. In 2016 the number of US forces fell to around 8,000 instead of 6,000 as planned earlier due to security situation. The Afghan administration had concerns about the post-withdrawal scenario and their consequences which would be discussed below in the paper. Though President Trump increased the number of forces for Resolute Support Mission and by November 2017 they reached up to 15,000. The Trump administration developed a new strategy that focused more on situation approach rather than following a timetable. The current focus is on increasing the offensive against Taliban along with engaging in a meaningful dialogue that would end America's longest war (Katzman, 2017).

2.5. An endless protracted war

The war in Afghanistan has failed to yield the intended results for the US. Americans miscalculated the situation entirely and as early as 2003 claimed that the combat phase of the operation has ended. The complex ground realities hit them with realization in 2006 when the Taliban resurged with more vigor and violence. The war has entered in eighteenth year and besides the peace talks there seems no hope of ending insurgency and reaching a peaceful settlement. Afghanistan paid the price of this shortsighted misadventure with loss of lives, infrastructure and stability. The United States and its allies suffered a great deal as well. Afghanistan intervention is a constant thorn in the foreign policy of USA, while NATO countries officially ended their combat missions in 2015; the Americans cannot wipe their hands that easily of the mess in Afghanistan. Complete withdrawal without a peace deal would not only destabilize the entire region it would also be a massive embarrassment for the superpower. Yet after spending $975 billion, the peace settlement is nowhere in sight (Amadeo, 2019).

Ever since the combat mission ended in Afghanistan security situation is getting worse with an unprecedented increase in the insurgency. In a study conducted by the BBC, 66% of the country has active Taliban presence. While 4% is in full control of the Taliban, only 30% is in full control of the government (Sharifi & Adamou, 2018). According to US watchdog the number of personnel in Afghanistan Security Forces, which includes the army, air force, and police all have fallen by 10% from 331,708 in previous year to 296,409 by the beginning of 2018 (McCarthy 2018). Afghan government's control has subsequently declined since 2015. US believes that international coalition pulled their forces out way too quickly, leaving a vacuum that provided insurgents with a breathing space. US General Mattis says that such a rapid withdraw of forces is partially responsible for increased insurgency. However, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg disagrees since he believes that NATO should have transitioned from combat to assisting and training role much sooner, training and enabling Afghan Forces is more sustainable than relying on international forces in order to fight insurgents (Brooke-Hollande, 2018).

Moreover Taliban have appointed shadow governors over 32 of the total 34 provinces. The local grievances against the existing political system, corruption and the desire for stability have generated a much favorable view of the Taliban. Moreover the opium production has increased since the US intervention. In 2008 Afghanistan's share in the global opium production was ninety-two percent. The Afghan conflict is irrevocably linked to the peace of the entire region. Continued instability would disturb the balance in the region but USA is caught in a quagmire, where it cannot bear the cost of staying in Afghanistan indefinitely and leaving without a peace deal would create a vacuum and plunge the entire region towards instability (Qazi, 2011).

2.6. Peace talks: need of the day

Currently, the war in Afghanistan is in a stalemate situation where neither the allies are able to maintain stability and eliminate the insurgency nor the Taliban are able to take control of Kabul. Hence the war is stuck in a limbo where neither side can claim victory. In this kind of uncertain situation another actor has risen in Afghanistan that is a rival to both US forces and the Taliban the Islamic State Khorasan Province. ISKP is a sub-group of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, while ISIS lost its caliphate in Iraq, its foothold is increasing in Afghanistan. It is perceived as a much bigger threat than the Taliban since the basic ideology of both organizations is different. Taliban are made up of local individuals whose aim is to fight the foreign forces while ISKP is more global in reach, their agenda is to formulate a caliphate in the Islamic world that transcends boundaries while the Taliban are only focused on Afghanistan. Moreover the ISKP has shown no reluctance in spilling civilian blood (Aljazeera, 2019). The Afghan officials initially denounced the presence of ISKP though a number of events forced them to modify their stand. The emergence of propaganda videos, distribution of pro-IS pamphlets and the pro-IS graffiti at the Kabul University affirms the existence of the group. Since 2016 to 2018, around 2,000 civilians have been killed in the violence generated by the ISKP. Their main tactic has remained suicide bombing and in 2017 they caused 22 percent of civilian deaths. In 2015 the ISIS spokesperson officially announced the group's outreach to Afghanistan as part of the Khorasan province that incorporates Pakistan and Central Asia as well. Taliban were quick to condemn the group and violent clashes between the two have been frequent. A number of Taliban fighters and commanders defected to the ISKP due to internal rifts (Khan, 2019). Both rivals clashed in Kunar, Farah, Nangarhar, Helmand, and Kunduz from 2014 till the spring of 2015and both sides suffered heavy losses. These instances make it apparent that ISKP is now a new force in the Afghan conflict. The battle for resources and territorial control continued though Taliban managed to clear ISKP from Farah and besides Nangarhar ISKP struggled to maintain its control. Though they almost managed to take Tora Bora from the Taliban. The intense fighting between the two groups is ongoing, even after the fall of ISIS caliphate in 2018. Some districts of Jowzjan region are still under the control of ISKP; this unprecedented rise shows will have a spillover effect for the entire neighborhood including Pakistan, India, Iran Central Asia China and Russia (Ramachandran, 2018). The ideology of Islamic states revolves around establishing a global Caliphate hence threatening the entire region. The threat posed to not only Afghanistan but the entire region has forced several regional countries to reconsider their positions in regards to the Taliban. These countries include Iran and Russia who have come to a realization that the threat of ISKP is much bigger than the Taliban who only aspire to consolidate the power in Afghanistan. These countries have put efforts to enable a favorable environment for peace negotiations between Taliban

and the US. Perhaps the presence of ISKP has forced all stakeholders to speed up the peace process and view Taliban as a legitimate party to Afghan conflict and crucial to counter the threat of ISKP (Khan, 2019).

Many attempts had been made to carry out direct talks with the Taliban, initially in 2013 during the Obama administration though the process derailed soon after Hamid Karzai refused to accept it. The Trump administration seems more adamant to carry out direct talks and broker a peace deal. The USA traditionally considered Afghan government essential to the Afghan peace process Trump administration with its direct talks has reversed this policy. Former US Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed as the Special Representative for the Afghan Reconciliation. Numerous meetings have been conducted between Taliban representatives and Khalilzad in Doha and Qatar. He carried out meetings with Pakistani officials as well. Negotiations carried out through 2019 and in March Khalilzad declared that an agreement had been reached on counter-terrorism and troop withdrawal. After the agreement the next phase is the intra Afghanistan dialogue (Thomas, 2020). In 2020 a massive breakthrough was achieved and the an agreement facilitating the intra Afghan dialogue was signed. The next would examine the previous efforts made for political settlement along with the US Taliban agreement.

3. Previous attempts at negotiations

3.1. Initiative by the Obama administration

In 2010 the Afghan government established the High Peace Council with a goal of moving towards a political reconciliation among all Afghan factions. The conclusion of the conflict in Afghanistan through negotiations and dialogue was the stated goal of the newly created body. In 2011, the Obama administration declared US intentions towards diplomatic engagement with the Taliban for a political settlement of the Afghan war. In 2013, Taliban established their political office in Doha to formalize the dialogue process (Miller & Blake, 2019). The informal contacts between US officials and Taliban representatives began in November 2010 with the aid of Germany in Munich. The second meeting took place in February 2011 in Doha. The aim was to discuss a prisoner exchange between the two parties. In May that year another engagement between the officials from both sides took place. In January 2012 the two sides met again amid a possibility of prisoner exchange as a confidence building measure. However this round of talks fell apart as both sides had divergent position. The US desired the Taliban prisoners to be released from Guantanamo bay to remain in Qatar, the Taliban disagreed and the talks failed (Shiekh & Greenwood, 2018). In 2013, the US once again albeit tentatively attempted negotiations with the Taliban. For the first time ever the Taliban opened their political office in Qatar. A permanent Taliban office in Qatar would serve as a base for negotiations. However a controversy generated when the Taliban displayed fight flag

on their office and referred to Afghanistan as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This angered the Karzai administration and effectively ended this round of dialogue before it even began (Roberts, 2013).

3.2. A brief overview of the Intra-Afghan dialogue

The talks to initiate an intra afghan dialogue began in the early years Hamid Karzai's presidency. He laid the foundation of a framework called Programme Tehkim- e-Solh. The Taliban commander in the Paktika province announced his allegiance to the new government and constitution along with twelve other Taliban loyalists. The program aimed at mainstreaming the Taliban into the Afghan politics and motivating them to renounce violent practices. The program however failed owing to the corruption among the ranks of its management. The biggest cause of the failure was the lack of political will and political support for the program.

In 2010 the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Programme (APRP) was established supervised by the High Peace Council. The leader of the High Peace Council was Burhanuddin Rabbani who led the Northern Alliance considered the arch enemy of the Taliban. The programme despite this managed to create contacts with mid level leadership of the Taliban. In 2011 however Rabbani was assassinated and the talks were suspended (Rubin, 2011).

Peace process roadmap 2015

In 2012, a proposal titled as the Peace Process Roadmap 2015 was presented by the Afghan High Peace Council during Pakistan Afghan bilateral meeting. The draft included proposal for addition of Taliban leadership in the national cabinet along with governorship of some provinces. Pakistan was appointed to play the role of facilitator however the proposal never materialized (Shiekh & Greenwood, 2018).

3.3. The Trump administration

President Trump in 2017 announced the strategy to conclude the Afghan war. The military campaign against insurgency went hand in hand with the political reconciliation. Though there was no clarity on how a political settlement will be achieved. In 2018, the longstanding US position that claimed the peace process to be "Afghan led, Afghan owned" was reversed. The US for the first time entered into talks with the Taliban leaders in Qatar without any input or representation from the Afghan government. This seismic policy shift can be attributed as the foundation for the current US Taliban peace framework. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad held meetings with Taliban leadership throughout the 2018 and 2019 (Thomas, 2020). He also met with officials from Pakistan and other neighboring countries. The negotiations centered

around two main points:

– The status of foreign forces in Afghanistan
– The prevention of international terrorist organizations from functioning in Afghanistan.

By August 2019 it was estimated that a draft outlining the peace agreement has been finalized however in September President Trump unilaterally called of the talks. He cited the insurgent attack in the Afghan capital that killed a US soldier. Despite the massive blow the Taliban invited the US to participate in negotiations once again (BBC, 2019). Over the next month unofficial talks resumed. On December 4th Zalmay Khalilzad officially joined the negotiations.

Prelude to the peace agreement

The draft of the peace agreement was fully flashed out and prepared. To reduce violence and assess the seriousness of the Taliban leadership a truce for a weeklong ceasefire was finalized. The intent was to determine not only Taliban intentions but also their control over their forces . the truce was implemented in February 22nd. According to the US officials the attacks and violence went down by eighty percent during the truce (Quilty, 2020)

3.4. The peace agreement

On February 29, the Peace Agreement was signed between the US and Taliban in Qatar witnessed by the US Sectary of State Mike Pompeo and delegates from neighboring countries including Pakistan. In Kabul the same day, US Defense Secretary and the Afghan President issued a joint declaration that affirmed the US support for the Afghan government and the Afghan government's willingness to hold talks with the Taliban (Thomas, 2020). The main features of the agreement include:

– US commitment to withdraw its five thousand of its troops within 135 days
– Withdrawal of all US forces within fourteen months
– Prisoner exchange between the Afghan government and the Taliban
– Removal of international sanctions on Taliban leadership by 27th August 2020 conditioned to the start of intra Afghan dialogue
– The Taliban must prevent Al Qaeda or other terrorist organizations from operating inside the Afghan territory against the US or its allies.

The agreement also lays down the timeline of the prisoner exchange and the beginning of the intra Afghan dialogue by March 10th 2020 (Graham-Harrison, Sabbagh, Makoii & Borger, 2020).

4. Hurdles in the way of the path of Intra-Afghan Dialogue

Talks with Taliban has always been a complex process in the US war on Terror strategy in Afghanistan and beyond. Now that an agreement between US and Taliban has been signed underlining the framework for intra Afghan dialogue, the political differences among various Afghan stakeholders pose a major challenge The most important factor that may impact the outcome of Afghan national dialogue lies in the fact that all Afghan actors have different interests while engaging in negotiations.

However, now that a framework for peace has been achieved, it's crucial that all conditions laid down in the agreement are fulfilled. According to US Defense Secretary Mike Espen the troop withdrawal is contingent to the beginning of the intra Afghan dialogue and a sustained reduction in violence. The agreement can be called off by Washington if the agreed upon conditions are not fulfilled by the Taliban (Seligman, 2020). Hence the agreement between the Taliban and the US is only the first step, the main task would be the intra Afghan dialogue and a consensus on power sharing formula between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

4.1. The political fragmentation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a blend of a number of various ethnicities including Pushtuns, Tajiks Uzbeks, and many others. This kind of fragmentation in a society is a major hurdle when it comes to any settlement. Within the current government, the fragmentation is becoming more and more prominent. The Taliban, allied forces and even ISKP could not unite the current political stakeholders. In 2017, senior government officials formed a new coalition consisting of Uzbek-majority Junbish-e-Milli party; the Tajik Jamaat-e-Islami party and the Hazara Hizb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami party. Their demands included a decentralized decision-making process and political reforms. The timing of this coalition can serve as a major blow to the government that is struggling to maintain its relevance in the current scenario (Katzman, 2017).

The Pashtun dominated Taliban are opposed by the Northern Alliance and the existing political structure of Afghanistan There were some talks of the interim government which would facilitate the reentry of Taliban into the political life. This notion was completely rejected by the Afghan president who believes that any peace deal without the Afghan government onboard would prove suicidal (Thomas, 2020). Though the peace agreement has laid down the foundation of talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, there are major hurdles that could complicate the process or even derail the entire agreement. The biggest of the lot is the political dispute between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. The presidential elections held on September 2019 have shattered any hopes of convergence among the Afghan political elites in Kabul. On February 18, 2020 both Ghani and Abdullah took oath as the president of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The country now has two presidents, though the US and international

community by large acknowledges Ghani as the head of the state. The two political leaders have disagreements on dealings with the Taliban as well. This uncertainty puts the Afghan government at an ever weaker position (Kumar, 2020). The fragile political system indicates the complicated situation in Afghanistan amid US efforts to ensure a political settlement. Though the Afghan government officials have made it clear that US troop withdrawal without taking Kabul's input and inclusion would render the results similar to the nineties Civil War. Washington also realizes the extent of instability in case the foreign forces leave without an intra Afghan dialogue and an agreed upon power sharing formula between all fractions (Alikozai & Habibzada, 2019).

4.2. Disagreement on the prisoner exchange

In the agreement a proper timeline was devised for the prisoner exchange between the Afghan government and the Taliban. This became the first roadblock on route to a national all inclusive dialogue for political settlement. The agreement signed between the US Taliban explicitly states that the Afghan government would release five thousand Taliban prisoners imprisoned in the Afghan jails while the Taliban will free one thousand of the Afghan prisoners by March 10th 2020. After the signing of the peace agreement the Afghan government was anticipated to announce the release of Taliban prisoners. The government however refused, as a result the intra Afghan dialogue that was suppose to begin by March 10th never started. The joint statement by the Afghan government and the US does not acknowledge the figure of five thousand prisoners let alone the deadline mentioned in the agreement. The understanding between the US and Afghan government was that US will play the role of a facilitator between the two parties regarding the exchange of a significant number of prisoners on both sides (Bezhan, 2020). President Ghani's refusal created a deadlock among the US and the Afghan government. on March 11th President Ashraf signed announced that fifteen hundred prisoners would be freed in the next fifteen days only if they provide written agreement that they would not participate in the violent Taliban campaign. If the Taliban continued their commitment to reduced violence only than other prisoners will be released. This proposal though initially rejected by the Taliban have been begrudgingly accepted after US Secretary of State's intervention. According to Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad a meeting via Skype was held between the Afghan government officials and Taliban regarding prisoner exchange on March 25th. Both sides have affirmed that the exchange would began by March 31st (Hadid, 2020)

The impasse between the two sides raised fears that the agreement might disrupt. The US announced the suspension of $ billion aid to Afghanistan. This prompted action from the Ghani administration and on March 26th a high level twenty one member delegate was announced to hold negotiations with the Taliban. The delegate would be headed by the former chief of the National Directorate of Security to President Ghani (AlJazeera, 2020). Though Abdullah Abdullah's input in this latest development is yet unknown.

Moreover the Taliban and the Afghan government have also made small progress regarding prisoner release. The Taliban delegate would visit Kabul and provide the lists of the Taliban prisoners however the number of prisoners released is unknown.

4.3. Resumption of Violence

The breakdown of ceasefire is a major irritant in the path of intra Afghan dialogue. Since the US Taliban agreement was signed, optimists speculated that Taliban might put an end to violence. According to the reports by the Afghan and US officials, seventy six attacks had been carried out within the four days of signing the peace agreement. Forty three attacks on the Afghan security forces were conducted in Helmand in a single day. As a response, US carried out airstrikes on the Taliban hideouts. Taliban and the US, despite the violence carried out against the Afghan security forces expect that the peace agreement will be upheld as no provision of the agreement conditions Taliban to refrain from attacking the Afghan security forces. This can simply be viewed as a tactic to pressure the Afghan government during potential intra Afghan negotiations (Thomson, 2020).

4.4. Role of regional countries to support different parties or the role of external forces

Afghanistan has a geostrategic location that can be a curse and a blessing. So far Afghanistan existence in the world map has proved to be a curse. A number of regional and extra-regional actors intend to utilize and manipulate the situation in Afghanistan in their favor. Pakistan has long been accused of harboring the Haqqani network and sponsoring the Taliban. Moreover India has also played a gamble in the country by making massive infrastructure investments and developing cordial ties with the current government. Pakistan had remained a supporter of peace talks and Taliban has exerted pressure in bringing them to the negotiation table. Moreover according to US officials the Russians and Iranians have also grown adamant in their support if Taliban. Both these countries opposed the Taliban government but the emergence of ISKP and their global jihadist agenda has forced the regional powers to reconsider Taliban as viable force to bring stability in the country (Thomas, 2020).

Recently, Russia hosted a multilateral peace conference called Moscow Peace Talks in November 2018. This was the first-ever multilateral conference attended by the Taliban, delegates from Pakistan, India, China, and even the Afghan government took part. The Russians intended to develop an atmosphere of goodwill between Kabul and Taliban, though the conference ended without any breakthrough due to Taliban's policy stand against Kabul. Pakistan welcomed the gesture by the regional countries. This suggests that the regional and sub-regional powers want to settle the issue alongside USA (Roth, 2018)**.** The international community by large has supported the peace

agreement between the Taliban and the US. Particularly Pakistan, as a sustained political settlement in Afghanistan would have positive impact on Pakistan's internal security situation.

5. USA-Taliban peace talks-CPEC perspective

CPEC has no direct connections with US dialogue with Taliban in Afghanistan but it's a double criteria for the talks as on the one hand it took initiative to start talks with these forces but on the other hand they are in mood to encourage dialogue with Taliban in Pakistan. CPEC being the project of BRI also encouraging peaceful environment for making the project successful.

5.1. CPEC as a regional economic integration

South Asia is considered to be one of the least integrated regions in the world with high unexploited economic prospects. Afghanistan is now considered at the crossroads of Central Asia and South Asia hence its can serve as a bridge between the two regions. South Asian countries share common history and heritage but political differences have proved a major hurdle in terms of economic connectivity and cooperation. The benefits of economic cooperation are usually ignored in most of the regional countries including Pakistan and Afghanistan. The political situation and the presence of conflict have rendered the region with low levels of regional integration. South Asia is the fastest-growing region of the world owing to India's emerging economy. It has the potential to become the second-largest economy in the world if its member states develop an integrated economy. A huge opportunity for the regional countries in this regard is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Economic corridors play a vital role in boosting economic efficiency and strengthening regional cooperation. Furthermore these corridors improve infrastructure and regional connectivity, there is direct relationship between regional corridors and increased trade and regional development (Srivastava, 2011). The main purpose of economic corridors is to stimulate trade and improve circumstances so that regional cooperation and development can occur (Petrella, 2018). They increase economic activities along major infrastructures such as roads and rails. Economic growth, infrastructural development, telecommunication cables, pipelines, and tourism is enhanced along the corridor. Along with economic outcomes efforts are made to concentrate on social and other impacts of the corridor as well. In the context of South Asia, economic corridors would augment connectivity across the region, improve global trade and speed up the process of regional integration.

CPEC has become a centerpiece of economic activity in the region. It's the framework through which regional states can boost connectivity and integration. If used properly it can serve as a model for economic growth in the region. Its benefits are not only limited to China and Pakistan but the whole region can benefit from it (Butt & Butt, 2015).

The potential to enhance economic integration between South Asian states as well improve economic cooperation among the regions of Central Asia, Middle East and East Asia. Inclusion of major regional actors, namely Afghanistan, India and Iran, are vital for enhanced economic connectivity (Ali, 2015). As many as 52 countries have shown interest in the project, the Iranian President Hassan Rouhanihas already expressed willingness to join CPEC and improve cooperation especially in sectors of energy.
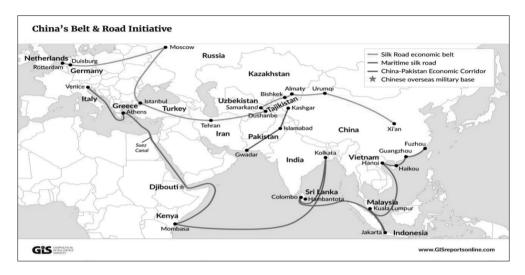

Figure 1

5.2. CPEC and Prosperity in Afghanistan

The relation between CPEC and Afghanistan is reciprocal. If CPEC is successfully implemented in Afghanistan it would not only benefit Afghanistan but also the true potential of CPEC as a connectivity tool would be realized. Instability in Afghanistan would result in uncertainty for foreign investors investing in CPEC. Afghanistan's GDP is mere $22 billion and per capita income is $600 (Awan, 2018) Moreover the security situation of Pakistan is very closely linked with that of Afghanistan, instability could trigger a spillover effect threatening not only CPEC but the very stability of Pakistan. Afghanistan, on the other hand, needs venues that can develop its economy, bring livelihood and develop infrastructure. CPEC is the perfect opportunity to achieve these goals. The current negotiations if successful would at least bring stability though after continuous instability and insurgency the economic uplift would become necessary to maintain that stability. China has already extended invitation to Afghanistan. Since including Afghanistan is necessary for complete regional connectivity. Along with connectivity and infrastructure Afghanistan would be able to shun its overdependence on foreign aid. It is estimated that CPEC would create job opportunities and thus uplift the economy. Moreover politically Afghanistan's bilateral ties with

Pakistan and China would improve. Afghanistan is a landlocked country, combined with the conflict its venues for economic uplift are minimum. The infrastructure, connectivity and industrial set up are nonexistent. CPEC thrives on connectivity and building infrastructure. Investments carried out under CPEC could include a railway track between Torkham and Jalalabad, development of copper mines in Afghanistan, Peshawar to Kabul Motorway (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). Two highway tracks connecting Dera Ismail Khan to Angoor Adda and Ghulam Khan in the Afghanistan are undergoing construction. These tracks would connect the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan to the Paktika and Khost provinces of Afghanistan. The direct link would serve as an opportunity for local Afghan businesses to communicate directly with their market base in Pakistan (Khan, 2018).

Moreover, the potential of hydroelectricity is abundant which the foreign investors can exploit. The Badakhshan province is abundant in untapped minerals such as Azure, Gold, Ruby, and Copper mines. China and Pakistan can help Afghanistan in capitalizing on these resources. Construction of the Lowari tunnel at the Wakhan corridor would facilitate in a route connecting Pakistan to Central Asia via Afghanistan. All the transit movement with CARs would pass through Afghanistan. Moreover CPEC could serve as a Confidence Building Measure and it can pave the way for work on TAPI. TAPI was a gas pipeline agreement signed between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in 2015. Unfortunately due to the political clout and distrust this project could not be completed (Ali, 2015).

Afghanistan is abundant in natural resources while the lack of infrastructure, political stability and continued conflict renders it difficult to tap into those resources. China has shown an interest in Afghanistan resource havens. Extension of CPEC would grant Beijing access to those natural resources while Afghanistan would benefit with infrastructure projects, land access to Gwadar and serve as connection between China and Central Asia. This engagement would be mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Seventy percent of Afghanistan's products are imported by Islamabad and New Delhi, in case of regional connectivity its untapped copper and iron would find a market in China and Central Asia. Kabul's advantages for joining CPEC are twofold, first can access to large markets such as Central Asia, China along with export of its natural resources and secondly the infrastructural development in Afghanistan that would uplift the Afghan economy (Khan, 2018).

5.3. Successful Taliban talks and its positive impacts on CPEC

CPEC and Afghanistan have a reciprocal impact on each other. The successful peace agreement between the stakeholders would ensure stability in Afghanistan which as discussed earlier would have a direct impact on Pakistan. Moreover the success of CPEC depends on peaceful and business-friendly environment. To carry out any economic

activity stability plays a vital role. Unstable Afghanistan would ultimately have a spillover effect and could potentially destabilize Pakistan in particular Balochistan and former FATA. To ensure the smooth working of this billion-dollar project Pakistan and China both are keen to play their role in enabling a stabilized and peaceful Afghanistan. The connectivity between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East is only possible if Afghanistan is involved. The existence of a prosperous Afghanistan would benefit the entire region not only politically but economically as well. Afghanistan's stability is one of the major challenges faced by the project.

Pakistan can reap huge benefits in case of connectivity between the two countries. Militancy, cross border terrorism would be addressed as both neighbors would be interdependent on each other for economic development. Local businesses on both sides would foster. Economic stability and security situation both go hand in hand. As a result of political stability, reduction in violence and improved security situation Kabul would be included in CPEC. Inclusion in the corridor would improve economic situation in Afghanistan and breathe life into Afghan economy hence contributing in the stability of the country along with improvements in the security situation as the Afghan youth would benefit from the employment opportunities generated by CPEC. The overall improvement in the security situation and economic benefits of Afghanistan inclusion into CPEC are the main drivers of Pakistan' proactive and positive role in US Taliban peace negotiations. The country moreover affirmed her support for the intra Afghan dialogue and reiterated the need of a successful peace settlement between all factions in Afghanistan.

China played a positive role in encouraging dialogue between Taliban and US. In recent years China has played a subtle yet effective role in Kabul. There is a realization among both Islamabad and Beijing that a stabilized Afghanistan in terms of security, politics and economy would result in a stable South Asia. Only a stable Afghanistan can connect China to Central Asia and trade its valuable natural resources. To ensure a stable and conflict free Afghanistan negotiations and political settlement between all Afghan stakeholders and Taliban is the most critical step. A sustained ceasefire and stability are the only route available for a stable Pakistan and successful CPEC. This convergence of goals is the primary motivations behind Pakistan and China's active role in a successful negotiations and peaceful settlement of the longest US war.

6. Conclusion

The US war on terror policy in Afghanistan entered into another episode post-US/NATO drawdown from Afghanistan that will take the matter to use more technology than the humans and forces. This factor also forces by the change in US administration under Trump leadership as he believes the full pullout from Kabul. The fate of Afghanistan and the entire region is now resting on the outcome of negotiations between Taliban and

the Afghan government. The region's political landscape was altered forever when USA invaded Afghanistan to extradite Osama Bin Laden. After countless lives and billions of dollars lost US has come to a realization that they cannot maintain their control over Afghanistan. Hence the superpower seems in a rush to resolve the issue and end the continuous embarrassment and waste of resources and finances. US policymakers are facing new crises such as rising China, North Korea, Iran crises and the war in Syria. They intend to focus on these contemporary issues and rid themselves of the too-long Afghan war. The regional countries also realize the importance of peace settlement for Afghanistan.

The Taliban, on the other hand, are also suffering from war fatigue. This war has been dragged for too long and the only solution is through dialogue. The initiative of China Pakistan Economic Corridor is a massive opportunity for the entire region. Though in order to make it successful the external challenges to the project must be eliminated. The biggest challenge being the Afghan conflict. Termed as game changer, CPEC needs to fully operationalise in Afghanistan though the current instability is preventing any such ambition. For CPEC to succeed the settlement of Afghan conflict is mandatory. Hence China and Pakistan must put all their energies in ensuring a conducive environment for the ongoing dialogue. Ultimately the peace in Afghanistan along with the extension of CPEC would ensure the prosperity of the entire region.

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