

The Humanities, Conflicts, Insecurity And Identity Contestation In The 21st Century: The Development Challenges And Lessons From History

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Introduction

Violent conflict in sub-Saharan Africa has been responsible for the direct and indirect deaths of millions of civilians and has contributed significantly to the low levels of human security in the region. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa that have been embroiled in violent conflict are characterised by abject poverty, inadequate service provision, political instability, retarded economic growth and other challenges to overall development that deter the enhancement of human security (Bawd and Chikwanha, 2010). One of such countries is Nigeria. This has become a growing concerns for scholars in the Humanities and even social scientists. Hence, gathering here today to discuss “**The Humanities, Identity Contestation, Security and Development Challenges in the 21st Century Africa**”, is germane and timely.

Nigeria is a plural country with over 250 ethnic and linguistic groups as well as many other factions or sects within the body polity that must be satisfied or at least treated justly for peaceful co-existence. The multi-ethnic nature of the country has created several identity crises and contestations and has become a bane in the move towards achieving national development. Thus, since the attainment of independence in 1960, the country has faced several challenges in its bid to hold the different groups and factions together as one indivisible political unit or nation for proper development and progress in the nation. However, due to the complex nature of the Nigerian state and the mutual feeling of dissatisfaction and suspicion between and among the various groups in the country, some elements have over the years risen up to express their grievances, some have even taken arms against the government and

people of Nigeria to make their cases or resentment known, thereby while holding the nation to ransom and threatening the unity and security of the Nigerian state. Hence, many lives have been lost and properties worth billions of Naira destroyed in the course of violent demonstration of grievances in the country, the height of which was the case of the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970.

Nevertheless, in the post-civil war period, many groups have continued to agitate for being unjustly treated or marginalized, thus resorting to violent protest like in the case of the Niger Delta Militancy, among others. The current aggrieved groups that are on the rampage posing serious security threats to the Nigerian states are the Boko Haram Sect, and their twin armed bandits ravaging the country with their incessant killings and massacre of Nigerian citizens across the country defying the presence of the defence and security institutions in the country. Of course, not forgetting other criminal elements and their activities like armed robbers, thieves, rapists, fraudsters, among others. Hence, many conflicts and criminal activities constitute threats to the peaceful disposition and security of the nation in the 21st century. It therefore, imperative to discuss the factors promoting conflict and insecurity in Nigeria given the focus of this conference.

Conceptual Clarifications

Before launching into the discussing of the factors that promote insecurity in Nigeria, it is pertinent to clarify the concepts of conflict and insecurity, especially within the context of this discourse, and how it will be used in this narrative.

Conflict

Conflict as a phenomenon has been conceived differently by different writers and scholars. While some scholars view conflict from a negative perspective as regards its destructive and adverse impact, while others view conflict from positive side regarding some positive impact and changes that conflict can engender. Hence, “many psychologists and sociologists have argued that it is through conflict that problems are often solved and real differences reconciled” (Green 2006: xvi cited in Etuk and Folashade, undated). On the other hand, Deutsch (1973:1) views

conflict as an action, which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures or renders ineffective another action with which it is incompatible. Thus, Deutsch's view is from negative perspective. However, it seems to be a bit comprehensive and it presents the picture of opposing ends. However, it does not include the aim or/and end of conflict which might be positive impact or changes (Etuk and Folashade, undated).

More so, Wilson and Hanna (1979:255) see conflict as “a struggle involving ideas, values, and limited resources”, while Osita (2005:2) sees it as “an opportunity to change”. From these two conceptions of conflict, Etuk and Folashade, infer that:

Thus, combining Wilson and Hanna's view with that of Osita's conflict becomes a struggle that involves ideas, values, and limited resources that has the capability to create a change which is likely to be a positive or better one. It therefore implies that conflict is neither negative nor positive per se. Hence, it is attitude that determines the pattern of conflict, the strategies to deal with it as well as its end or implication on the system-all of which has a lot to do with the perception of conflict (Etuk and Folashade, undated: 5).

Be that as it may, for the purpose of this paper, we shall focus more on the negative aspects of conflict, viewed as an action or event which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures or renders ineffective another action with which it is incompatible. Thus, it is mainly destructive and inimical to reasonable development and growth with its space of occurrence, hence constituting developmental challenges.

Insecurity

Many scholars have defined security in their different words and perspective. But this paper will not go into discussing all of these different definitions or conceptualisations of security. However, in all, one thing stands out which is that insecurity cannot be discussed in isolation from security. Hence, Onifade, Imhonopi &Urim (2013: 54) assert: “to ably define insecurity, it is pertinent to have a brief discussion

on what security is”.

Just like most concepts in the social sciences and humanities, the concept of security has been viewed from different perspectives by different scholars and writers. Security has therefore been conceived as securitization which involves the “the framing issues as security” that is if something can be defined as threat to security then it can be used to provide justification for emergency measures which gives authorities more power than they would otherwise have. For Lawrence Freedman, a new understanding of security has emerged because of the changing nature of war over the 250 years and to him security means defense of a nation against conflicts and infectious diseases. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and other scholars of social contract argue that security is the most important duty of the state. This implies that the need for security as a catalyst for growth and development of any sovereign state is indispensable because poor security system clogs economic growth and development as investors may be discouraged from investing in the area with high security risks. Security therefore encompasses the idea of safety with the presence of peace, justice and the absence of threat and conflict which might be, among others, economically, socially, politically, ethnically, and religiously driven (Haralambus et al. 2013).

Accordingly, Omede (2012) defines security as a dynamic condition which entails the relative ability of a state to counter threats to its core values and interests. Hence, what is central to security here is that the state has its core values and interest, which it seeks to protect. It therefore becomes the duty or responsibility of the state (which is usually represented by the government) to provide security for its citizens and properties because it is its first duty (Onifade, Imhonopi &Urim, 2013). More so, Hobbes argues that it is only the state that has what it takes to guarantee security and save society from anarchy, and since the state is represented by its government, the state should through its government provide adequate security so as to justify its *raison d'être*-which is reason of being or purpose of existence (Gaskin, 1996).

In all, one can say that insecurity is the anti-thesis of security (Onifade, Imhonopi &Urim, 2013). Thus insecurity is viewed in two perspectives

to include (1) a state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger and danger denotes the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robara, 2013). (2) A state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, and anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robara, 2013). Thus, in a situation of insecurity those affected are uncertain of what would happen and they also lack the ability to protect themselves against any harm that may happen. Hence, this paper defines insecurity as the lack or absence of safety, or the fear of uncertain perceived harm or danger with no knowledge of averting it or protecting oneself in the society or state of occurrence.

Historicizing Conflicts and Insecurity in Nigeria Up To the 21th Century

By the very complex nature of Nigeria with over 250 ethnic nationalities and linguistic groups, coupled with the history of the colonial formation of the country with the myriad of unresolved differences, grievances, and interests, conflict seems to remain an inherent characteristic of the Nigerian body polity. Thus, shortly after independence in 1960, the nation was caught up in a complex web of conflicts, which eventually culminated in the Civil War experience in 1967-1970. With the end of the Civil War and the unresolved underlying causes of the war and with the continuation of the military in the political leadership of the country, grievances, poverty, mutual suspicion, were still much pronounced in the body polity, making conflict a recurring decimal in the history of the country. Some historians, political scientists and observers avow that, given the nature of unresolved difference before the return to civilian rule or democracy in 1999, democratic governance was only going to launch the country into the dawn of 'old wine in a new bottle' as regards conflicts in the 21st century. Thus, Therefore, Nigeria in the 21st century has become almost synonymous with conflicts of various scales, forms, and dimensions across the different regions. It is in the light of this fact that Odozi and Oyelere assert that:

While violent conflict is found in all parts of Nigeria, it is important to mention that the intensity of conflict exposure varies across regions. The three zones with the highest prevalence rates are the North East, North

Central and South South regions of Nigeria. According to Azad, Crawford and Kaila (2018), from 2010 to 2017, 49% of households in the North East experienced at least one event of conflict or violence against a household member. In the North Central region, 25% of households experienced some type of conflict event and in the South-South region One-fifth of the household (22%) have been directly affected by conflict events or violence (Odozi and Oyelere, 2019).

Apparently, from North to South and West to East, Nigeria has been plagued with violent conflicts in the 21st century. These conflicts assume different forms which include ethnic, religious, economic, political, and communal clashes, terrorism, militancy, youth restiveness, electoral violence, among others (Ikeke, Undated).

In North Eastern States of the country such as Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Yobe, the Boko Haram insurgency has been strong with Borno State as the base of Boko Haram operation. In the North Central States such as Benue, Nassarawa, Niger, Kogi, Plateau, herders-farmers conflicts have become commonplace. In the South East there have been pro-Biafra agitations. In the South-South there has been what is popularly known as the Niger Delta agitations and conflicts between the locals and the multinational oil firms and the Federal Government of Nigeria over oil petroleum resources and the benefits accrued to it (Odozi and Oyelere, 2019). In between these conflicts have been the various ethno-religious clashes between the predominantly Muslim North and predominantly Christian South and electoral conflict across the nation.

All of these conflicts hinder tremendously, the chances and opportunities of economic growth and development in the country as they have become major sources of insecurity. To some extents, these conflicts could have been avoided or averted. Thus, it has been argued that:

Nigeria's current general insecurity challenge has become compromised by avoidable conflicts that have become a common issue in recent times. This has become more worrisome especially when the

impoverished segments of the Nigerian masses are finding it increasingly hard to avoid starving to death. Resources that could have been used to modernize the agricultural sector, build industries and infrastructure to create employment, have been consumed by budget for insecurity and in the rehabilitation of displaced and injured citizens. It will not be an exaggeration to observe that the current wave of general insecurity is fueled by poverty. Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity. This has made national security threat to be a major issue for government and has prompted huge allocation of the national budget to security...No region has been spared the vicious scourge of conflict though their prevalence and intensity have not been the same in occurrence across the length and breadth of the nation. Thus fingers are swift in pointing accusingly to colonial legacies and continual interplay of external and internal imperialist forces that fan the embers of violence for selfish aggrandizement. The present situation is further intensified by elements of globalization, natural disasters, proliferation of weapons and light arms, corruption, executive lawlessness and leadership ineptitude...(Eneji and Agri, 2020: 2).

From the above excerpt, it is clear that conflict and insecurity have not only obstructed economic growth and development in Nigeria over the years, they also cause a diversion of huge public fund into security network operations and services to curb and check the twin vices. And this huge public fund would have been used for the provision of infrastructure and establishment of industries in the nation, which would have created several job opportunities for the teeming youths in the nation. Thus, the cost of insecurity and conflicts within Nigeria remains a bane in the nation's socio-economic growth and development.

More so, many factors have been identified to be responsible for the

prevailing conflicts and insecurity in the country in the above excerpt. The factors could be summed up to be; internal, external, remote and immediate. Hence, at this juncture, this paper will like to address its major focus which is 'factors that promote conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria in the 21st century'.

Factors that Promote Conflicts and Insecurity in Nigeria in the 21st Century

Since conflict and insecurity have remained a constant menace in the Nigerian socio-political milieu affecting and disrupting many activities and development, in order to tackle it, it is fundamental to pin-point those factors that engenders or promote this ugly phenomenon in the body polity. These factors are either remote or immediate. Some of these factors responsible for conflict and insecurity in Nigeria are highlighted below:

Remote Factors

- **Lack of Institutional Capacity/ Government Failure:** Insecurity in Nigeria can be linked to government failure seen in the inability of government to deliver public services and provide for the basic needs of the masses. This lack of basic necessities creates a pool of frustrated people who are ignited easily by any event to be violent. All of this is connected to the break-down of Nigeria's institutional infrastructure which leads to deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability, hence frustration-aggression tendency in the masses, and the attendant consequence of security threat (Igbuzor, 2011).
- **Ethno-Religious Conflicts:** The presence of various ethnic groups and opposing religions (majorly, Christianity and Islam) in the country has caused most of the conflicts and security threats in Nigeria as a result of mutual distrust, suspicion, and intolerance between and among some adherents of these religions. Thus, Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), Hazen and Horner (2007), Salawu (2010), and Igbuzor (2011) are of the opinion that ethno-religious conflict is the major source of insecurity in Nigeria.
- **Weak Security System:** The inadequacy in the security system in Nigeria both in training and weaponry coupled with the poor

attitude or behaviour of security personnel towards security issues has only created loopholes for insecurity in the country. Hence, security personnel abet crimes, sabotage government effort by supporting and fuelling insecurity, supply criminals with arms, and help them to escape the long arm of the law (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robara, 2013).

- **Inequality/Unfairness:** The unequal distribution of the nation's resources and the unfair treatment of the greater part of the Nigerian population is one major source of socio-economic conflict and factor promoting insecurity in the country. This always happens from the point of perception of marginalisation by a section of the country, and through this, frustration sets in and the people seek way to express their grievances about the pervasive state of inequality and unfairness in the country (Onuoha, 2011).
- **Loss of socio-cultural and communal value system:** Since the traditional value system of Nigerian societies and communities was based on high value on life, collectivity and communalism, moral acts, among others, it frowned at theft, unjust and unfair treatments, suffering, wealth aggrandizement, and all other anti-thesis of traditional socio-cultural value of Nigerian society introduced by 'modernity through colonialism' which has led to major conflicts between the people and the corrupt government, thus contributing to security threat in the nation (Clifford, 2009).

Immediate Factors

- **Porous Borders:** The porosity of Nigerian borders leads to unchecked and untracked movement into and outside Nigeria, thus making it easy for weapons to come into the country from other countries and this creates a big security challenge for the Nigerian state. The availability and the proliferation of small and light weapons coming from other countries into Nigeria has made it easy for militant and criminal groups to have access to crime (Hazen and Horner, 2007). Again, the porosity of borders has led to unwarranted migrants from neighbouring countries like Niger, Lake Chad, and Benin Republic into the country and this has promoted insecurity in Nigeria (Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012).
- **Rural-Urban Migration:** Onuoha (2011) argues that the

movement of unemployed Nigeria youth from the rural areas to the cities also promotes insecurity in Nigeria. And since Nigerian cities have grown beyond the environmental carrying capacities and existing infrastructure resulting in poor living conditions in these cities. Hence, these jobless youths become frustrated and resort to crime which creates insecurity in the country (Adedeji and Eziyi, 2020).

- **Unemployment/Poverty:** The failure of the different administrations in Nigeria to address the issue of unemployment, poverty and unequal distribution of the wealth of the Nigeria nation has pushed the youth into criminal acts which in turn has created a big socio-economic conflict and security challenge in the country (Adagba et al, 2012; Nwagbosa, 2012).
- **Social Irresponsibility of Corporate Bodies:** The essence for corporate social responsibility by companies is to offset corporate social irresponsibility. Sadly, companies in Nigeria neglect this social responsibility to their communities of operation and this has led to the rise of some terror groups as was the case with the Niger Delta militants which posed a great security challenge to the Nigeria as a nation. Hence Kotchenan Moon (2012) assert that social irresponsibility is a set of actions that increases externalised cost and/or promotes distributional conflicts.
- **Terrorism:** Terrorism has remained the most fundamental source of insecurity in Nigeria and its primary roots have been generally located in religious fanaticism and intolerance especially in Islam dominated states in Nigeria. Thus terrorism in Nigeria is an Islamic insurgency with a political undertone by a faceless group in the Northern region of the country with the name Boko Haram which takes into account the legitimate political, economic and social grievances of the Northern population. Thus, this terrorist sect called Boko Haram is responsible for the death of over 1000 lives since 2009 (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robara, 2013).

In addition to the factors responsible for conflict and insecurity in Nigeria, one other important factor identified is the natural factors which include climate change and natural disasters. For instance, the herder-farmers conflict in the country has been attributed to the issue of climate

change as the cattle herders have had to migrate from the region of low water and scanty vegetation to a better region southward where they can graze their cattle. And this always lead to their trespassing upon peasants' farmland, thus, creating conflict and insecurity in the country. On the other hand, natural disasters like flood also render many people homeless, thus, making them victims of attack as well potential aggressor of the nation as a result of perceived government negligence of their condition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the above discussion, it is crystal clear that conflict and insecurity are inseparable, and those factors promoting conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria and both remote and immediate factors most of which are internally based factors and some external factors. However, since these factors can be traced, isolated, and clarified, it therefore means that they can be tackled and surmounted accordingly by both the government and individual/group efforts, through concerted efforts to eradicate or reduce the obvious and strong denominators like, ethnicity, religious intolerance/fanaticism, inequality/unfairness, corruption/misappropriation of national wealth, unemployment, among other. With all of these vices reduced or eradicated, the security disposition of the country will improve paving way for national growth and development.

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