

COMBATING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA THROUGH CULTURAL REVIVALISM

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Abstract

It is no longer news that security concerns in recent times have challenged the sovereignty of the Nigerian State. The various dimensions of these challenges have made phenomena like Boko-Haram, militancy, kidnapping, political violence, Fulani herdsmen, political violence, destruction of lives and properties etc. Obnoxious as these circumstances are, the machinery of governance is compelled at times to negotiate and possibly capitulate. However, analysis of these problems will reveal that they are based on a culture that is alien to the country. The question of what to do, especially as security agencies have become victims of these challenges, is one that begs for urgency. Perhaps, if the culture and traditional values of the various ethnicities in Nigeria are revisited and revived, the nation will purchase a new lease of experience that holds the human life sacred, and places the common good of the society first. This paper explores the dimensions of the security challenges in the country vis-à-vis the trado-cultural provisions in tackling them as shall be seen in the cultural values which abound in every African society. It is hoped that paradigms from these cultural values will engender a renaissance of some imperative cultural aspects which will enhance a new sense of national orientation.

Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that Nigeria has been enmeshed in a firebox of insecurity leading to scores of deaths of innocent civilians, foreigners, some members of the nation's security personnel, clerics, elected officials, many government workers and personnel of non government organizations. The insecurity challenge has assumed formidable dimensions forcing the country's political and economic managers and, indeed the entire nation, to rue the loss of their loved ones, investments and absence of safety in most parts of the country. The number of violent crimes such as kidnappings, ritual killings, carjacking, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically-motivated killing and violence, ethnic clashes, armed banditry and others has increasingly

become the regular signature that characterizes life in Nigeria since 2009 (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012). Government has tried everything from “force-for-force” to carrot-and-stick approach to diplomacy but the problem seems to rise with greater monstrosity like the proverbial phoenix. There has also been strong advocacy for a multi stakeholder intervention to the insecurity question rather than lean on military options alone (Imhonopi & Urim, 2013), but the problem has defied the present medication it is getting. This may not be unconnected with the increasing ethnic hate, religious bigotry, political rivalry and a growing population of disgruntled citizens in the country who feel that they have been short-changed and given very limited or no access to the common patrimony. Egwu (2001) had made this observation when he argued that the primordial tendencies of various ethnic groups towards violence, the perennial eruption of various ethnic militias and the preponderant religious fundamentalism in place, given expression to by some sections of the dominant religious establishments in Nigeria, have inevitably aggravated the scale and propensity of insecurity and widened its scope in various ramifications. Not only has the continued state of insecurity threatened the very fabric of national integration in the country and created the ecology of fear, disquiet and anxiety, it has also meted a deadly blow or what Imhonopi & Urim (2012) call “spectral bite” to industrial development. The destruction of the badly needed infrastructure has taken the country many years backwards. The government has continued to trudge on in the face of this daring challenge and has continued to evolve strategies to contain or douse this conflagration.

Meanwhile, academic writers, social researchers, scholars, security experts and consultants have also not rested in making diverse recommendations and probable solutions to address this national blight. In this paper, focus is on examining the contributions cultural values can make in tackling insecurity in Nigeria.

Close to this, the need for an examination of the ethical basis of the problematic social relations in Nigeria was accentuated by former President Obasanjo in his October 1999 National Day speech, where he drew the attention of an anxious nation to the need to regenerate the cultural and moral foundations of all actions and to continue to search for the conditions that would make Nigeria a just, free and wealthy society. His statement revealed that Nigeria was yet to achieve the much desired ethical conduct requisite for sound social relations which could guarantee the maintenance of security, peace and order in the country (Ujomu, 2001).

Conceptual Analysis

To ably define insecurity, it is pertinent to have a brief discussion on what security is. The first duty of a government is to keep its citizens safe because, only the state has the wherewithal to guarantee security and save society from anarchy (and since government represents the state), the state through its government should provide adequate security to justify its *raison d'être* (Gaskin, 1996). In this wise, Omede (2012) sees security as a dynamic condition which involves the relative ability of a state to counter threats to its core values and interests. McGrew (1988) holds that the security of a nation hangs on two important pillars which are (1) the maintenance and protection of the socioeconomic order in the face of internal and external threat and (2) the promotion of a preferred international order, which minimizes the threat to core values and interests, as well as to the domestic order. For Nwolise (2006), security is an alien encompassing condition which suggests that a territory must be secured by a network of armed forces; that the sovereignty of the state must be guaranteed by a democratic and patriotic government, which in turn must be protected by the military, police and the people themselves; that the people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals such as unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution socio-economic injustices.

Dike (2010) and Omede (2012) have taken this argument a step further by emphasizing that Nigeria's security should be based on a holistic view which sees the citizens as the primary beneficiaries of every security and developmental deliverable that the state can offer. Thus, Nigeria's security will involve efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria so it can advance its interests and objectives to contain internal and external aggression, control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth and improve the welfare and quality of life of every citizen. As Omede (2012) pontificates further, the nation's security should include the preservation of the safety of Nigerians at home and abroad and the protection of the country's sovereignty. Conversely, insecurity is the antithesis of security and has attracted such common descriptors as want of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty, want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded or protected, instability, trouble, lack of protection and being unsafe, and others. Achumba, Ighomereho &

Akpor-Robaro. (2013) argues further that these common descriptors point to a condition where there exists a vulnerability to harm, loss of life, property or livelihood. Therefore, they consider insecurity to be a state of not knowing, a

lack of control, and the inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or that make them vulnerable. For Beland (2005), insecurity is “the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection.” It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger. This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity, and it feeds into many other forms of insecurity such as economic security and social security. In this paper, insecurity is conceived as a situation where human and national security of a state is compromised by internal or external forces or interests exacerbated by the former’s weak or poor economic, military and/or human resource development conditions.

Aetiologies of Insecurity in Nigeria

Drawing copiously from existing literature on insecurity in Nigeria, the aetiologies of insecurity within Nigeria are as follows:

a) Absence of Institutional Capacity Resulting in Government Failure.

Fukuyama (2004) calls this the breakdown of institutional infrastructures. The foundations of institutional framework in Nigeria are very shaky and have provoked a deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability, thus, paralysing the existing formal and legitimate rules nested in the hierarchy of social order (Achumba, *et al*, 2013). This view is collaborated by Igbuzor (2011) who sees the state of insecurity in Nigeria as a function of government failure. This manifests in the incapacity of government to deliver public goods to its citizens. This lack of basic necessities by the Nigerian people has created a growing army of frustrated people who resort to violence at the slightest provocation or opportunity. Because of this situation, the crime rate shoots up and the security of lives and property are no longer guaranteed.

b) The Gaping of Inequality and Absence of Fairness and Justice

The perception of marginalization by many Nigerians is informed by the ostentation showed by the political class and elite vis-à-vis, the grinding poverty to which citizens are subjected. Even security has been bourgeoisified by the elite. This state of inequality, unfairness and injustice has toughened the people, forcing them to take their destiny into their hands.

c) Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Ethno-religious conflicts have been identified as a major cause of insecurity. Ethno-religious conflicts exist when there is misunderstanding between members of one ethnic and another religious group, such group in a multiethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontations to settle grievances. These conflicts have also revolved around who gets what

and how in the state especially as it concerns the distribution of scarce resources, power, land, chieftaincy titles, local government councils, control of markets and expansion of religious territories. These conflicts have resulted in large-scale killings and violence among ethno-religious groups in the country.

d) Disconnect between the People and Government : Over the years, there has been a growing disconnect between the people and government. Governments, whether military or civilian, have not tried to bridge this chasm, thus creating misunderstanding, mistrust and resentment. Consequently, because the people do not understand government or have a perception that government does not care about their welfare, they become easy prey to centrifugal forces who co-opt/incite them to vent their anger on perceived enemies of the people and sometimes go to the extent of destroying national properties.

e) Weak and Poorly Funded Military Establishments; In spite of the high security vote state governments receive on a monthly basis, there is greater insecurity in many states. Some of these monies find their way into the pockets of some highly-placed private citizens and the Chief Executives of the states, leaving the hapless citizens to the mercy of criminals and sociopaths. Also the armed forces, paramilitary establishments and the police under federal control are weak institutionally, heavily politicized and poorly funded. This status quo makes it easy for the nation's security to be compromised.

f) Non-Prosecution of Perpetrators of Violence In Nigeria The lack of arrest and prosecution of perpetrators and sponsors of violence has encouraged many more social deviants and their godfathers to throw caution to the wind to perpetrate evil in the land. The Nigerian society has become a rigout of powerful fiefdoms controlled by feudal lords who are almost as powerful as the state and maintain a rental economy within the larger national economy.

g) Loss of Socio-Cultural and Communal Value System; The collapse of cultural and moral values within Nigeria is one critical factor to the continued security challenges that the country is faced with. The disintegration of communal value system which placed high premium on human life and despised greed, oppression and exploitation of the weak, among others, has also contributed to the unpleasant security environment in the country. New values that are zero-sum, Narcissistic and corrupt in nature, that preach that might-is-right have all taken over. Endearing social values and morals have been traded off for western values. All these factors combine to create the sultry security situation in the country.

Conceptualizing Culture and Security Challenges in Nigeria

Culture and national security are interrelated. They sometimes display conflicting variations which may arise from inconsistencies which are noticeable in our set of beliefs; especially when these challenging inconsistencies to our beliefs may come from outside. Anthropologists in their study of culture have found that culture has an immense impact on human beings in any society because it helps man to adapt to his society and hence to increase the chances of survival. There are as many definitions of culture as there are diverse cultures across the globe, although these definitions tend to say the same thing. Castro-Gomez (2002) holds that "culture constitutes a sphere of moral, religious, political, philosophical and technological values that permit man to "humanize" himself, i.e. escape the tyranny of the state of nature". Dzurgba (2007) holds culture to be of overwhelming importance to human life as it is, to him, "a summation and distillation or the getting of the past experience that is an indispensable foundation for living in the present and developing in the future. Culture summarizes the past successes and achievements, failures and defeats, problems and solutions in order to inform the present life and to protect the future life".

The entire idea enshrined in the above is that of culture as social heritage which is the collective knowledge of the whole social world in which individuals share. Thus, culture is shared ideas. A considerable part of culture consists of ideas that bear directly or indirectly on behaviour. For instance, custom demands that people should be kind to the blind, the deaf, the lame, the afflicted, etc. However, it should be noted that there are many other parts of culture that are not directly connected with social behaviour, for example, the technological knowledge that permits the transplanting of a human part from one body to another body which has contributed in the new trend of merchandise of 'kidney harvesting' Uroh (1996) is clear on the fact that "culture is a product of a people's experience. It is the knowledge of doing things which people have acquired in their attempts to solve some socio-historical problems". Thus culture becomes the result of a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. However, based on the foregoing, it can be said that culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economical, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization. A crucial factor in the analysis of culture is social control, which helps to ensure conformity to societal norms for an ordered society.

The analysis of the role of culture as the very texture of social contract theories and of viable human organizations is closely tied to the thematic issues of national security affecting both the individual person and the community at large. This view tends to imply that the protection and development of a nation-state is culturally contextual. However, it is important to note that no nation can achieve total security. Thus, a nation may be considered secure if there is a high probability of the occurrence of its preferred national values. Tukur (1994) defines values as “the highest ethical standards and criteria through which individuals, groups and societies order their goals, determine their choice and judge their conduct as these pertain to fundamental aspects of life, be they in the sphere of personal or public affairs”. The capacity to make judgments in interaction with the challenges of the human environment and society helps to formulate and institutionalize essential policies on culture. On many issues, it is widely taken that the critical area for the solution of social and national problem is that of culture since culture contains the ultimate values which motivate human and national action in historical perspective. This view is corroborated further by the fact that, in securing the various compartments of culture, such as language, customs, norms, art, science, metaphysical belief, there is a concomitant security of the human social systems, which in turn creates a sort of individual and community alliance. Hence, the distinctive analysis of culture is historically necessary for any form of security and development. Nigerian’s present condition “is traceable to problems derived from both internal developments within the state and from its increasing marginalization in the global political economy”. Every nation draws up strategies to prevent its potential and actual destabilization. Such strategies are usually contained in a National Security programme. A cultural policy as an instrument of social engineering demands a notion of culture as a strategic instrument (Uchendu, 1988). This cultural engineering process is the deliberate political effort to channel behaviour in the direction that will maximize national objectives. The vital linkage between culture and security at any level is better underscored by statements related to the nexus between culture and development. The real problem of Nigeria comes from the inability of those in authority to make the right choice and firm commitment to cultural matters because they underestimate the value of culture in development”. It can be inferred from the above statement that the capacity of a nation to survive is entrenched in the cultural values prevailing at any point in time. Abdusalami Abubakar (2004), a former military Head of State of Nigeria, identifies some of the major security problems currently confronting the nation to include: “political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organized crimes. These problems individually and

collectively constitute threats to the peace, security and development of the country. Invariably, they have implications for the continuity and survival of the nation's nascent democracy". It can be observed that in recent times, cultural symbols - mostly drawn from tradition - are manipulated by ethnic groups for political mobilization with a view to realizing a set of goals and also gaining political power solely for their group. Against this backdrop of ethnic symbolization. The rising national insecurity is equally witnessed in the Hausa-Igbo and Yoruba-Hausa ethno - religious clashes, the settler - indigene claims in Jos-North and Barkin Ladi LGAs of Plateau State, the perennial Southern Kaduna religious squabbles, the Boko Haram religious hiccup, the Fulani herdsmen killings and destruction of farm crops, to mention only the most obvious instances; where hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost. Also, the purported marginalization of the South-South and south east people by the Nigerian state is a factor that has reinvigorated the clamour for self-determination of these people, and where militia groups like Egbesu Boys, MASSOB, IPOB, MOSOP, etc., have become a great threat to national security in Nigeria.

The Nigerian economy suffers from the corruption of the political class which administers the nation. Within these leadership echelons, there has been the mismanagement of resources and the looting of the national treasury, which has further helped in entrenching crass materialism and a culture of mass poverty in Nigeria. The resultant effect of this sort of poverty syndrome in the larger populace is the high crime wave the country has been experiencing, particularly Fulani herdsmen. It can therefore be said that political and economic perversions and corruption have resulted in the insecurity of the various sectors of the nation, some of which adversely affect the provision of social services, industrialization, the security sector development, etc. The very first value of culture in the entrenchment of national security is the development of national personnel and institutions which are essential for true patriotism and national consciousness. The values of national security are thus quite incompatible with paying lip service to the issue of cultural development

Regenerating Of Cultural Values In The Fight Against Insecurity In Nigeria

A culture is an embodiment of different values with all of them closely related to each other. That is why one can meaningfully talk about social, moral, religious, political, aesthetic and even economic values of a culture. African culture is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long

and avoid bringing curses on them and others. The insecurity challenge in Nigeria has become a formidable challenge for the Nigerian government and peoples. The governance challenges facing the polity have trickled into the society, resulting in moral decadence. The growing dissatisfaction, discomfort and distress within the larger society coupled with the unabating official corruption, high unemployment rate, economic crisis, pauperization of the masses, decaying infrastructure and a futile national integration project have heated up the socio-political environment. Consequently, armed conflicts, terrorism, ethnoreligious holocausts, kidnapping, political assassination and other violent crimes have become the leitmotif of Nigerian social relations. The government has made efforts to contain the insecurity inferno raging in many spots in the country, but until the cultural foundation on which the Nigerian state is fulcrum is regenerated, Nigeria may be walking the precipice. This paper argues for the need to revive and reinforce cultural values and virtue in the country and that the country should go a step further by codifying these values/principles so that Nigerians, small and old, can begin to imbibe these virtues to guide their conduct, behaviour and social relations with others. First of all, government carries a moral burden to lead by example. Providing moral leadership that eschews evil, corruption, vices, inequity, injustice and wickedness will compel the people to model the character of their leaders and vice versa. In addition, the democratic system in place must begin to deliver the needed social goods so as to improve the standard of living of Nigerians and deliver many citizens from the state of absolute poverty to which they have been subjected for a long while. Third, there is need to identify the cultural values and ethical virtues that should guide the conduct and behaviour of Nigerians. These values should be built on the respect for human life, the regard for human dignity and the right to life, liberty and security of the people; the freedom of worship, religion, thought and conscience; and the freedom of opinion. Fourth, there should be a codification of the moral values and virtues the government and Nigerian peoples subscribe to for the good of the larger society. Fifth, government should plug all the holes through which scarce resources are being siphoned so as to free resources for national development and equipping of the military to fulfil its functions. Lastly, there is need for a national conversation or dialogue where Nigerians can release their pent-up anger and frustration against the state and fashion out the blueprint for the engagement of all the component units that make up Nigeria. Paying lip-service to the matters of insecurity in Nigeria by government and its representatives is sitting on a time-bomb that may soon explode. Sustaining personal or regime security will not secure government or its representatives if this challenge is not nipped in the bud. The governance process must be erected on the pillars of moral values and

virtues and the Nigerian people must be led by a moral leadership that will strive to secure the commitment and support of all citizens to make the Nigerian project a true success.

Conclusion

Cultural values and norms in one way or the other have formed the core of the Nigerian indigenous arts. Issues of morality, ethics, discipline, positivism, collectivism and communal coexistence with dynamics such as love, obedience, respect, honesty, and friendliness are recurrent themes in Nigerian folklores, tales, myths and legends. It has always communicated to the people in accents clear and still. From the cultural performances highlighted in this discourse, it can be seen that they encapsulate themes ranging from social control, societal cleansing, honesty, and communal co-existence to a functional obligation to traditional norms and values. The incorruptible must be upheld as a paragon of cultural virtue for all to imbibe and the corrupt sanctioned.

On the whole, cultural creativity is perceived as something which can be controlled, manipulated, engineered, or predicted. The acceptability of cultural creativity is used to characterize a person and the skill he possesses, a process and the new or better way it produces something, an activity and the occupation, vocation, or profession it elicits, a product and the ways it satisfies a long felt need, awakens strong feelings, alters living perspectives, recalls and revivifies the past; offers a total vision; etc., or all of these indiscriminately bundled together. The issue now is repositioning them in a way that they are brought to bear on the present challenges that threaten to disintegrate the Nigerian state.

Recommendations

Against the background of strength of analysis on this discourse, and the above made conclusion, the following is recommended:

- a) Cultural studies should be mandatory at all levels of education in the country, with competitions organized regularly to orchestrate how students can bring cultural dimensions to bear on their studies thereby facilitating a wholesome cultural reorientation;
- b) Government at all levels, traditional institutions and individuals must work to revitalize and popularize cultural performances across the nation through agencies such as schools, the mass media, community or age – grade organizations.

- c) Traditional institutions who are the custodians of these cultural forms should be repositioned to wield the kind of influence they had before the advent of colonialism;
- d) Parents must endeavour to revive the moonlight storytelling traditions in homes as a means of cultural education so as to raise a generation that is versed in their cultural backgrounds and core values of the nation;
- e) Cultural festivals should be popularized and held more frequently in competitive forms from the local to national levels; winners and committed promoters of these arts should be given National Merit Awards as a way of encouragement and recognition ;
- f) Government at all levels should commission researches in cultural studies so as to bring out the potentials for national advancement and stability.

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