CULTURE OF VIOLENCE AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL VIEW

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Abstract

Peace is an indispensable condition for the development and growth of human in the society. Nonetheless peace is thwarted and scuttled and seems to have eluded human sine-dine because of his inherent culture of violence intrinsic in his nature at least in the Hobbesian perspective, which has the elements of injustice, hatred, selfishness and tendency toward violence, among others. Anyone conscious of the happenings in Nigeria, cannot but agree that most part of the country hardly enjoy the state of tranquility because of the unjust culture (the culture of violence) prevalent in the country. Violence can be noticed in all the Geo-Political zones of the country from North to South, East to West and Central. If the country is not dealing with Boko Haram insurgency from the North East, it is trying to handle kidnapping activities in the South, or is making effort to reduce the harm caused by Herdersmen-farmers clash in North central or is trying to arrest the situation in the North West caused by Banditry and killings in Kaduna. These have affected millions of people and have resulted in lost opportunities relative to economic development, persistent poverty and inequality in the country. Beyond these are the insecurity and death these have caused. The work adopted the method of analysis as it helped in examining the fundamental cause of all these challenges. Thus, this paper attempts to highlight and examine the Culture of Violence and its various manifestations in Nigeria. The study concluded that to reduce the culture of violence in Nigeria, we need to consciously transform, reintegrate and re-orientate the minds of men and women to embrace peace by going back to our communal root. This is because; it makes for a peaceful, progressive and harmonious co-existence in the society.

Keywords: Peace, The culture of violence, insecurity, communalism.

Introduction

Martin Luther King Jr. in his Nobel Peace Prize address (1964) observes and corroborated with the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in saying that "we live in a period when civilization is shifting its basic outlook: a major turning point in history where the presuppositions on which society is structured are being analyzed, sharply challenged, and profoundly changed"[1]. This is the situation the world system and Nigeria in particular finds itself today. We live in a world; where 'might is right', the world that is torn by division, injustice, poverty, and culture of violence, a world of unjust culture where our pattern and way of life is inhuman, unfair, deceptive and wrong. Violence in Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*(1965) is understood in five different categories namely: force, physical or psychological injury, aggression, coercion and militancy or radicalism. These are the avenues through which colonialism thrived mostly in Africa leaving the culture of violence in its wake for Nigerian to grapple with. By the application of these

corrosive mechanisms stated above, colonialism destroyed the native structures and superimposed its exploitative structures, thereby making the natives enemy of one another. Meanwhile, the success of this venture lies with the following; the relegation of the natives' language and imposition of a foreign one among the natives, introduction of colonialist clientele bourgeoisie meant to serve colonial interests and create weak institutions, also to keep the native town in constant fear; and then, introduction of inherent segregation among the native and settlers. This work attempts to interrogate and examine the Culture of Violence and its various manifestations in Nigeria. It also seeks to consciously transform, reintegrate and re-orientate the minds of men and women to embrace peace by going back to communal root for a peaceful, progressive and harmonious co-existence in the society.

Culture of Violence

According to *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, culture has to do with the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group**.** It equally involves the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time[2]. It is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization. On the other hand, violence is the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy something or even kill human being. Violence causes injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation.[3] Having divulge the dictionary meaning of culture and violence it is important to note that their meaning in this work is contextual hence the meaning of culture of violence.

Culture of violence could be seen as unfair and wrong ways of life by people in their attempt to assert themselves and meet the challenges of living in their environment. It is an unjust, deceptive, and wrong pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior in the society. These believe, attitude and behaviour makes the people commit all kinds of crime without remorse. Consequently, the culture of violence looks at the pervasiveness of specific violent patterns within a society.[4] The concept of violence being ingrained in human society and culture has been around for at least the 20th century. The notion that a culture can sanction violent acts developed into what we know as culture of violence theory today.[5] An examples of culture legitimizing or ignoring violence can be seen in Nigeria where the leaders are nonchalant or slow towards addressing violence arising from Boko haram insurgency, Banditry in Zamfara state, killing in Kaduna, Herders-famer crisis in Benue axis etc.

Furthermore, the culture of violence potentially accounts for inter-generational violence and domestic violence.[6]Childhood exposure to violence in the household may later lead to violent relations in the larger society. Similarly, early experience with domestic violence is likely to increase an individual's potential for development of anger and fear and the desire for revenge.

There are many factors which contribute to the persistence of violence among individuals and on a societal level; gender is one relevant factor to understanding

the culture of violence. In Nigeria, majority of reported crime involves male but with a few female. However, there is a growing body of evidence to support the notion that women can perpetuate relational cycles of violence. Culture of violence has an impact on people as a whole, for individuals who have experienced trauma in their lives the impact can be much greater.

Additionally, Culture of violence is analogous to Thomas Hobbes "State of Nature". The state of nature in the thinking of Hobbes was a state in which men lived prior to the setting up of organised human society. In that state there were no laws, no authority, no morality and no sense of justice rather the entire environment was annexed with violence. It lacked the central sovereign power, life was precarious, for human nature was predominantly egoistic, and man will do anything that seemed to him necessary for self-preservation, no one will act on that maxim that will militate against self-preservation[7]. To drive this point home, Hobbes opines that an invader has no more to fear than man's single power, if one plants, sows, builds or possesses a convenient seat, others may come with force in order to dispossess and deprive him, not only of his fruit of labour, but also of his life or liberty. And this invader may be attacked by another invader[8]. Popkin and Stroll discern that in the state of nature "conflicts always break out among them in the effort to satisfy their desires at the expense of others"[9].Consequently, for Hobbes state of nature becomes a state of continual fear, and danger of violent death, where the life of man becomes solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish and short[10]. This really is a reflection of the culture of violence where individuals are driven by their egoistical, instinctual struggle for power, glory and security.

From the above discourse, the culture of violence becomes the unjust, inhuman and wrong pattern of behavior and activities of men or group towards others in the society. These kinds of life is experienced politically, economically, religiously, socially, globally, and are driven by injustice, hatred, selfishness, individualism and tendency to self-preservation[11]. Let's consider some manifestations of culture of violence in Nigeria.

Manifestations of Culture of violence in Nigeria
Within the context of this work, we are going to look at some of the manifestations of violence in the Nigerian society particularly in recent time. Some of these manifestations include but not limited to killings in Kaduna, banditry in Zamfara, Boko haram in the North East, herder-farmer crisis in the North Central and South East, etc.

Boko Haram Insurgency
Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram, is a jihadist terrorist organization based in the northeast of Nigeria[12]. It is an Islamist movement which strongly opposes man-made laws. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002, the organization is a Muslim sect that seeks to abolish the secular system of government and establish Sharia Law in the country. The

movement, whose name in the Hausa language, Boko Haram, translates as "Western education is sacrilege" or "a sin" in 2011, was responsible for about 1000 killings in Nigeria[13]. Though the group first became known internationally following sectarian violence in Nigeria in 2009, it does not have a clear structure or evident chain of command. Moreover, at the beginning it was a matter of debate whether Boko Haram has links to terror outfits outside Nigeria but owing to recent activities of the group it has been established that the Boko haram in Nigeria is a terrorist group. The group has adopted its official name to be People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad, which is the English translation of *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*[14].

According to Bartolotta, cited in Eme, Boko Haram propagates that not only interaction with the Western World is forbidden, but it is also against the Muslim establishment and the government of Nigeria. The group publicly extols its ideology despite the fact that its founder and former leader Muhammad Yusuf was himself a highly educated man who lived a lavish life and drove a Mercedes Benz.[15] In the wake of the 2009 crackdown on its members and its subsequent reemergence, the growing frequency and geographical range of attacks attributed to Boko Haram have led some political and religious leaders in the north to the conclusion that the group has now expanded beyond its original religious composition to include not only Islamic militants, but criminal elements and disgruntled politicians as well. Put into perspective in our discussion, the activities of the Boko Haram insurgency is a manifestation of culture of violence.

Religious Violence
It is a situation that involves the use of provocative words, quarrelling, fighting occasioning harm, maiming, killing and so on between opposing religious parties[16].In African countries especially Nigeria there are African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. African traditional religion here refers to the indigenous religion of Nigeria, whose scriptures and fundamental principles are non- documented. Islam is the religion of the Muslims, which is largely practiced in Northern Nigeria and it is very uncompromising in the totality of its claims for authority over all aspects of life[17]. On the other hand, Christianity is the religion of the Christians, who pay ultimate allegiance to God Almighty who is seen to be beyond this sinful world. In Nigeria due to certain circumstances some of these religions have often clashed, thereby giving rise to very serious consequences[18]. These clashes or violence in Nigeria may be seen as intra religious violence or inter religious violence. Amidst all the causes of religious violence, one may observe that ignorance, poverty, fanaticism, and the hegemonists or opportunist exploration of religion for political ends is the major cause of the violence. The need for inter-religious dialogue in a religiously pluralistic state like Nigeria is expedient. The aim of dialogue should not be to obliterate the identity of a participating religious group. Rather its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that pose as threat to the peaceful co-existence between members of different religious groups. The promotion of inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria, will therefore contribute a great deal in averting religious violence.

Ethnicism
Ethnicity means an ethnic quality or affiliation resulting from cultural or racial ties and the concept of ethnicism denotes ethnic loyalty, which is a feeling of attachment to one's ethnic group. It involves a degree of obligation which is often accompanied by a disenchanting attitude towards those regarded as outsiders. One may observe that based on the heterogeneous ethnic social formation of Nigeria, there have been a high potentiality of lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and in addition a high tendency towards violent confrontations for various reasons which have contributed to the failure of Nigeria as a nation[19]. For instance, in some parts of Nigeria, ethnicity has employed the weapon of ethnic military that has led to unnecessary killing of members of other ethnic groups. Other groups have employed the weapon of serious blackmail backed by threats of more serious action to be taken in order to redress real or perceived marginalization. No wonder Nnoli in his text *Ethnic Politics* captures the colouration of Nigerian politics with ethnicism thus:

> Most Nigerians have come to believe that unless her own men are in government they are unable to secure those socio-economic amenities that are disbursed by the government. Hence governmental decisions about the siting a of industries, the building of roads, awards of scholarships, and appointments to positions in public services, are closely examined in terms of their benefits to various ethnic groups in the country[20].

Drawing from above, one cannot deny the fact that this is an existing status quo in Nigeria which reflects culture of violence and the implications is that it does not stimulate national development, peace and security of Nigeria.

Kidnapping
This is the crime of forcefully abducting a person and sending the person to another place or location, but often this is done with a demand for ransom. According to Adibe kidnapping is the taking away of a person against the person's will, and usually for ransom or in furtherance of another crime[21]. For instance in Nigeria, it has become lucrative business for militants, unemployed, swindlers and greedy people. It first started in the Niger Delta but today it has spread from the Niger Delta to all nooks and crannies of the country. The victims of kidnapping was first the foreign oil workers and later extended to Nigerians, including grandparents, parents, children or any person who has a relative that could be made to pay a ransom[22]. Kidnapping later assumed dangerous dimension whereby wives would want to fleece their husbands of their hard-earned money by organizing their own kidnapping and share the loot with kidnappers. Likewise, the husbands may do this to their rich wives and children may also do it to their parents. Here one can see kidnapping as a very dangerous culture of violence caused by government neglect

of her people and selfishness, which has cost a lot to Nigerians especially in the area of security, development and investment.

Political/Electoral Violence

Political violence is another manifestation of culture of violence. It is a violence perpetrated in order to secure political interest or fight against it. The motives behind political violence include political fanaticism, ethnocentrism, religious, extremism and ideological differences[23]. This violence could arise by aggression from frustration and social discontent or fallout of clashes among dominant groups in a society. One may observe that politics and violence are like Siamese twins in Nigeria. This is because political activity has always featured a notable degree of violence, in both the colonial and post-colonial phases of Nigeria's chequered existence. In the recent democratic dispensation, political violence in Nigeria has metamorphosed from open demonstrations (strike actions) to faceless bomb explosions and assassinations. Also election crisis is another political violence which is manifested especially through political thug and abduction among others. It is pertinent to note that this inhuman and culture of violence is not just peculiar to Nigerians, but is also prevalent in other parts of the world. Hence the need and desire for a philosophy of peace that will guarantee a progressive, peaceful and harmonious coexistence in the society.

Communalism as a possible solution to the challenges of Culture of Violence in Nigeria

Communalism refers to a system that integrates communal ownership. A prominent libertarian socialist, Murray Bookchin, defines communalism as "a theory of government or a system of government in which independent communes participate in a federation", as well as "the principles and practice of communal ownership"[24].It has "an underpinning philosophy of "Live and Let Live" and consists of solidarity. Solidarity, because there is alliance, collaboration, help, compassion, commitment to the cause of the needy, friendship and social charity among one another[25]. It establishes social justice that impels everyone in the society to promote and advance the cause of common good in the society. It gives the individual members of the society a "sense of belongingness, complementarity and integration in the society. Communalism will bring about the normative conception of personhood in the society, which involves one acquiring personhood by being integrated into the society, and being morally educated and socially responsible about the communal ways of life, values and respect for others. Nonetheless, this is conflicting to culture of violence that inspires selfishness, hatred, injustice and individualism to the disadvantage of the society and creates deficiencies in human flourishing and harmonious co-existence. Therefore, communalism and its Ujammaic (brotherhood) element will help reduce the challenges that arise fundamentally from the manifestations of culture of violence.

Conclusion

From the preceding discussions on the culture of violence in Nigeria, one may observe that culture of violence is an ill wind that blows one no good. No wonder,

John Paul II (1987) cited in (Ofoegbu and Anyim 2015) sees these structures as 'structures of sin'. He defines it as unjust structure, which is against God's plan and will, rooted in personal sin such as selfishness, short-sightedness, mistaken political calculations, and imprudent economic decisions. It is linked to the concrete acts of individuals, who introduce them, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins and so influence people's behaviour. Here, the Pope sees the culture of violence as an evil that should be avoided. The causes of culture of violence may not be limited to the negative human nature (selfishness, hatred, individualism, etc), but a reaction to injustices suffered from the hands of the oppressors (governments, leaders, and individuals).   The work concludes that to reduce the culture of violence in Nigeria, we need to consciously transform, reintegrate and re-orientate the minds of men and women to embrace peace by going back to our communal root. Again, education, tolerance, dialogue and reconciliation among others should serve as tools with which to douse the crisis that emerges from the practice of culture of violence in Nigeria. This will ensure peaceful coexistence of Christians, Muslims, Traditionalists and members of other interest. This would also help in the restoration of peace, security, growth and stability in Nigeria as a nation.

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