

frica and Insecurity: The Role of Philosophy towards Resolving Security Issues in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Security is essential for the survival and flourishing of any society. It involves the protection of individuals, communities, and nations against dangers and attacks. Security is so important that every government spends a substantial part of its money on its provision. Every community is only as strong or weak as the state of its security. This paper is a critical appraisal of security issues in Africa. Many African countries encounter security problems daily. Some of the challenges include -Islamist militancy by groups like al- Shabaab and Boko Haram, socio-political instability, xenophobic attacks, kidnappings, ritual killings, banditry, human trafficking, gender-based violence, and cybercrimes. Weak institutions, corruption, poverty, and marginalisation – political, economic, and social, are some of the fundamental roots of insecurity in Africa. The spate of insecurity in African nations calls for deep concern and concerted efforts to stem the tide. Moreover because in today's world, insecurity anywhere is a threat to security everywhere; terrorism across the continent has led to mass displacements of families and individuals. Insecurity of lives and properties has reached alarming levels in places like Nigeria and Somalia at the moment. The present coronavirus pandemic also constitutes a threat to the security of lives in African nations such as South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan, and the world at large. The article seeks to assess the current state of security in the African continent, examine the immediate and remote causes of insecurity and attempt solutions to the problem. The paper adopts conceptual analysis and reflective methods and maintains that Philosophy has an important role to play in resolving the insecurity issues in African societies.

Keywords: *Philosophy; Role; Insecurity; Africa.*

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy as a subject embraces all aspects of life. It is a critical attitude and reflection towards the problems of human existence. Philosophical thinking includes assessment of terms, evaluation of logical principles of reasoning, willingness to make a refined distinction between right and wrong, deduction and induction, faith and reason, fact and fallacy, knowledge and belief (Asike, 2017). This paper thoughtfully assesses security matters in Africa. The issue of security is a crucial concern for everyone because when insecurity occurs it automatically becomes a boundless social affair (Ugwu and Abah, 2020). The peace and security of many African nations have been threatened by various insurgent groups in recent times. Violent attacks on government offices, hospitals, mosques, and churches have destabilised society. Some children lost their parents and became orphans as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency while school programmes have also been interrupted. Hardship, joblessness, idleness, ignorance, and illiteracy all contribute greatly to the increase of insurgency in Nigeria. Many African countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Libya, Mali, Somalia, and Cote d'Ivoire have suffered terror attacks during which several people have been killed (Gbrie, 2016). Insecurity is

not peculiar to African nations alone. It is a challenge for several nations across the world. It hinders socio-economic development in society. The paper critically investigates security issues such as terrorism, kidnapping, xenophobia, and gender-based violence in Africa. It also attempts a solution to the problems.

Terrorism

Terrorism is the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce. The principal idea of terrorism is the belief in attacking innocent people (Walzer, 2012). Hoffman according to Ward (2018) considers it as violence or the threat of violence used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of a political aim, while Richardson, cited by Ward (2018), argues that terrorism deliberately and violently targets civilians for political purposes. Terrorist activities have led to the displacement of people and general insecurity in many African nations. Two of the terrorist groups in Africa include - Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. Kambela (2019, n.p) observes that;

The most prominent terrorist groups that are creating a terror impact in Africa include Boko Haram of Nigeria and al-Shabaab of Somalia. The presence of these terrorist groups, together with their allies across Africa, has led to property damage and huge numbers of people dying and sustaining injuries. In addition, terror activities on the continent have contributed to mass displacements of the civilian population. This growing trend of terrorist attacks, which has resulted in the increased movement of people across borders, remains a major security challenge for policymakers in Africa.

Boko Haram and al-Shabaab are privately financed with huge donations by unknown individuals. These groups threaten the peace and security of the people by launching wars and attacks against innocent members of society.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram means "Western education is forbidden" in the local Hausa language (Heather, 2014). Boko Haram promotes a version of Islam that makes it 'Haram' or 'forbidden' for Muslims to participate in any political or social activities with the Western States and their allies (Nwagboso, 2016). This includes voting in elections, wearing shirts and trousers, or receiving a secular education (Ireland, 2015). Their operation started in Northern Nigeria. The group planted bombs in many public places and churches in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria since 2011 (Walker, 2012). They have forced many pupils out of education and burned down many schools. Their activities have also extended to Northern Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Mali. The group's official name is Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, which in Arabic translates as: "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (Heather, 2014). It was founded in 2001 by Mohammed Yusuf. AbubakarShekau took over the leadership of the group after Yusuf was killed in 2009. Shekau has plugged Boko Haram into the international terrorist organisation called al-Qaeda (Ford, 2014). The United States Government described Boko Haram as a terrorist group that is connected with other militant groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to instigate a global jihad (Ireland, 2015). The group has been involved in suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, drive-by shootings, mass killings using guns, knives, and machetes, displacement of many families from their homes, attacks on schools, churches, and mosques, and abduction of several people (Mellgard, 2013).

Youths are seen by Boko Haram as easy prey that is recruited for serving their

purposes. The young people are easily recruited into the group because many of them are uneducated, unemployed, and not well integrated into society. Hence, they do not see a future for themselves. Boko Haram insurgency impacted negatively on Nigeria and other African states through destruction of lives and properties, disruption of businesses, reduction in government revenue, fear of foreign investors to live and do business in Nigeria, and political instability (Utibe, 2016). The sect has succeeded in instilling trepidation, terror, worry, confusion, and insecurity among the people of the society.

Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab is an Arabic term that connotes "the Youth," It is an insurgent group based in Somalia that employs guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics to seek territorial control over the country. Al-Shabaab emerged in 2006. The group operates mainly in Somalia (Dudley, 2018). However, it has also carried out attacks in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Djibouti (Miller, 2014). In areas under the group's control, al-Shabaab imposes its strict version of sharia-Islamic law (Jonathan and Mohammed, 2014). The group fights to create Islamic State in Africa. Al-Shabaab, according to Master (2013), enforces:

Its own harsh interpretation of sharia, prohibiting various types of entertainment, such as movies and music, the sale of khat (a narcotic plant often chewed), smoking, the shaving of beards, and many other "un-Islamic" activities. Stoning and amputations have been meted out as punishment on suspected adulterers and thieves. International rights groups have reported that al-Shabaab members have kidnapped young boys from schools and have forced them to fight for the group.

The Al-Shabaab is a militant group known for harsh enforcement of Sharia laws. As stated above, they carry out their operations through abduction, stoning, amputation, suicide bombing, and killing of people. Hassan (2012) observes that a significant reason why the youths join al-Shabaab is that it enables them to provide for themselves and their families. Poverty, unemployment, idleness, and illiteracy are some of the underlying factors responsible for the existence of the group in African society.

Xenophobic Attacks

The word Xenophobia is derived from two Greek words: "xenos" which means stranger and "phobos" which means fear (Psychologenie, 2020). It is the hatred or fear of that which is perceived to be strange or from a foreign place (Ekokotu, 2020). It involves the irrational and intense fear that people have against anything strange or unfamiliar, more specifically against people from foreign nations or ethnic backgrounds. It usually leads to reactions ranging from violence, large executions, or genocides. It may be caused as a result of bad experiences with people of certain groups or through exposure to xenophobic propaganda. Xenophobic attacks are common in South Africa. The citizens of South Africa are of the opinion that;

Immigrants [are] the cause of crime rise in the country despite the absence of any such evidence, and foreigners were mistreated even by the police due to such xenophobic attitudes. Most of the victims of such attacks and riots were either from Malawi, Zimbabwe, or Mozambique. Recently, in 2013-2014, Somali people have been attacked and killed in and around Pretoria and Port Elizabeth, which was condemned from all quarters (Psychologenie, 2020, n.p).

The South Africans maltreated and killed the immigrants because they think that a large number of foreigners is the reason for unemployment, poverty, and recession in their

country. Africans from different countries such as Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria were victims of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. They were battered, harassed, displaced, and killed. Properties of the foreigners including houses and cars were destroyed. The main driver behind the violence is a pervasive belief by the South Africans that foreigners make life difficult for them (Fayomi, Chidozie, and Ayo, 2020). The strangers are accused of working in South Africa where unemployment is very high. They claim that migrants from African countries are robbing them of the jobs available to young men in their countries leaving the citizens jobless and slowly taking over their economy (Nwadiuwe, 2019). The foreigners are also regarded as a threat to the beliefs, traditions, and customs of the natives. In other words, they constitute a danger to the local heritage and legacy of the country. In addition to this, they share in the resources of the nation. This is believed to constitute a strain on the economy and the standard of living of the citizens. However, the argument seems to be fallacious. The victims of the attacks are mostly legitimate migrants with responsible businesses who create no immediate or remote danger to their South African attackers. The migrants have contributed through their ventures to the socio-economic development and growth of South Africa. Xenophobia leads to a reduction in the influx of migrants to a society. This has negative implications on the social life of the nation; specifically, it deprives a society of useful resources and talents.

Kidnapping

Over the years, kidnapping in African countries has developed into a prolonged, rife security threat and an intricate web of illegal enterprise. Today, various armed groups and criminal gangs in different nations across the continent engage in the practice. The practice is common in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Somalia, and Ghana. Kidnappers are driven by different motivations: political, ideological, financial, social, and cultural (Assanvo and Okereke, 2019). Abductors extort friends, relations, and in some cases employers of the victims by demanding a huge amount of money for ransom before releasing the hostage. Okoli (2019, p. 65) argues that:

Each victim has a so-called “kidnap ransom value” which makes them an attractive target. This value is determined by a number of factors. These include the victim’s socio-economic or political status, family or corporate premium on the victim, the type of kidnappers involved, as well as the dynamics of ransom negotiation.

The above reveals that the abductors sometimes target affluent and eminent personalities in society. However, some people are also abducted for rituals. Kidnapping for ritual according to Oyewole (2016) involves killing or severing the body part of abducted persons to use it as an object of ritual sacrifice to acquire ritual money, favour, fame, success, power, and protection. In Nigeria for instance; “There is an entrenched myth that human body parts used in ritual magic bring wealth, power, protection, and success” (Assanvo and Okereke, 2019). Abduction either for ransom or rituals is a great threat to the security of people in African society.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is a form of violence directed against a person because of gender (including gender identity/expression), that reflects and reinforces stereotypes and inequalities inside society, depriving women of their ability to enjoy fundamental freedoms (Fronteddu, 2013; Osim 2021a; Osim 2021b). It can occur between both sexes.

However, it predominantly happens among the feminine gender in African culture. This is because of the patriarchal nature of African societies (Odey 2019; Akpanika 2020a; Akpanika 2020b). Women are not expected to be heard or take decisions even in matters that pertain to their well-being. Their main responsibilities are to procreate, nurture the children and the husband. In the traditional African culture, women are considered to be inferior to men (Odey 2018; Odey et al., 2020; Naseri & Ekpene 2011). They are also involved in domestic duties and house chores within the family. Although a good number of women in the contemporary time are engaged in businesses and employment outside the home, they are not exempted from cultural practices that are not only violent, denigrating, and unpleasant but also dangerous to their wellbeing and violate their human rights. Gender-based violence according to Fronteddu (2013, n.p) includes:

Domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, marital rape, sexual abuse/assault, sexual violence during conflict and harmful customary or traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages and honour crimes: trafficking and forced prostitution and violations of human rights in armed conflict (in particular, murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy); forced sterilisation, forced abortion, coercive use of contraceptives, female infanticide, and prenatal sex selection.

The above practices constitute everyday experiences of the feminine gender in contemporary African societies.

The concept of human security consists in preserving international stability based on the promotion of the following values: respect for democracy, the defence of human rights, good public affairs management, the peaceful settlement of conflicts, and the protection of the environment (Fung, 2006). African nations today are insecure. They experience instability, lack of respect for democracy, and disregard for human rights. The present situation in the African continent today calls for deep concern. It is similar to the Hobbesian state of nature where there is perpetual fear and strife. Life in this state of nature is described as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Callistus, 2017). Insecurity of lives and properties, terrorism, kidnaps, and violence are the order of the day. No real development on the part of the people, a great number of people are uneducated, unemployed, and poor (Naseri 2017a). Indeed, the Hobbesian state of nature is reproduced in African countries. Weak institutions, corruption, poverty, and marginalisation are some of the fundamental roots of insecurity in Africa.

The Role Of Philosophy Towards Resolving Security Issues In Africa

Philosophy has a key role to play in resolving insecurity issues in African societies. Philosophy is a critical rational enquiry concerning existential human concerns. Asike (2017, p. 84) views that:

Philosophy involves the clarification of concepts and understanding of life. It removes the ambiguity and vagueness in our ontology. Thus, with this in question, it will find reason in revealing the ambiguity in religious doctrines which may be harmful to society. Philosophy, therefore, is rational scrutiny of religious claims and it critically examines the exigency of overzealous religious inhibitions in human existence.

Lawhead (2015) agrees with the above position. He argues that Philosophy involves clarification, evaluation, and justification of our beliefs. It is observed that dogmatic religious beliefs have resulted in religious conflicts and wanton destruction of lives and properties in some African countries (Naseri 2017b). Over the years, many

people have been killed, maimed, and wounded during religious conflicts (Emeng 2005a; Emeng 2007; Emeng 2014). In fact, violent religious conflicts create an atmosphere of national insecurity and uncertainty which are detrimental to the economic growth and development of the society (Jegade, 2019). However, a proper understanding of Philosophy will help people to critically examine and evaluate religious doctrines and abstain from actions that are injurious to other members of the society.

The knowledge of Philosophy enables individuals to fit in well in interpersonal, inter-ethnic, and international relationships (Abakare and Okeke, 2016). A major cause of ethnic conflicts according to Salawu (2010) has to do with accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism, and bigotry. Ethnic relations in many African countries are typified by division, hatred, and rancour (Ndubisi, 2015). There is a kind of natural hatred of one ethnic group against another. However, the knowledge of substance and accidents in metaphysics (a branch of Philosophy) shows that every human person shares one substance – the humanity of the human person (Ndubisi, 2015). Thus, the "humanness" in one tribe or ethnic group is not inferior or superior to another. This helps people to understand that there are no fundamental differences among all ethnic groups. Hence, the knowledge of Philosophy provides for an unbiased assessment of human behaviour regardless of human ethnic affiliation (Emeng 2005b; Ndubisi, 2015). This will bring about peaceful co-existence among various ethnic groups. The knowledge of Philosophy also brings about new approaches to issues (Abakare and Okeke, 2016). This is possible because Philosophy sharpens the mind and liberates it from prejudices. This enables individuals to question cultures and traditions that negate reason. Such practices that are not in tandem with reason are thereby rejected or amended (Abakare and Okeke, 2016).

Ethics is a branch of Philosophy that provides rules and principles that guides human conduct. It helps us to distinguish between good and bad behaviours. It helps people to develop virtuous characters and shun bad behaviours. The knowledge of ethics will help politicians to abstain from politics of rancour and animosity. It gives the political leaders a sense of duty and responsibility to the citizenry. This enables them to seek the interest of the masses and make decisions that will promote the growth and development of society. It will also help us to have law-abiding citizens that have regard for constituted authority. Philosophy makes us understand the responsibilities of citizens to the government and other members of society and the responsibilities and duties of government to the people. Philosophical theories also advocate fairness, justice, equality, freedom, and preservation of human rights. These values promote peace and security in society.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated security challenges in African countries. It noted a plethora of insecurity issues bedevilling African nations such as terrorism by Islamist militancy groups like al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, socio-political instability, xenophobic attacks, kidnappings, ritual killings, banditry, human trafficking, gender-based violence, and cybercrimes. It critically examined issues that pertain to terrorism, xenophobic attacks, kidnapping, and gender-based violence. It compared the African society to the Hobbesian state of nature where life is poor, nasty, brutish, and short. It argued that weak institutions, corruption, nepotism, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, and marginalisation are some of the fundamental roots of insecurity in Africa. The paper, however, noted that Philosophy has

an important role to play in resolving security issues in Africa.

Security will be enhanced in African nations if leaders desist from corruption, nepotism, and ethno-religious favouritism, and seek the best interests of members of the society. Education should be accessible and affordable. Job opportunities should be provided for the unemployed. This to a large extent will reduce the level of ignorance, illiteracy, and poverty in the society and prevent and solve some of the security problems in African nations. Extreme religious beliefs and activities (such al-Shabaab and Boko Haram) that promote insecurity and are inimical to the wellbeing of individuals and the society at large are to be strongly resisted by the government. Also, the government should upgrade the armaments of security personnel. They are to be equipped with modern arsenals and artilleries to provide safety and protection for the citizenry. Security officers are to be exposed to local and international training and new security strategies to confront the contemporary problems of insecurity in various countries. Moreover, they are to enjoy inspiring and timely remunerations, hazard allowances, and life insurance.

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