

History of Terrorism, Youth Psychology and Unemployment in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

The appeal of using terror to get one's way is becoming an acceptable option among Nigerians. It has been vicariously imprinted in our psychic that some degree of terror can fetch you whatever you want. This is because there is no serious effort on the part government to critically look into and tackle this menace head-on. Several factors, such as poverty, politics, religion and ethnicity, among others, have been identified as antecedents of terrorism in Nigeria. This introductory paper examines terrorism as an offshoot of unemployment in Nigeria in relationship to Frustration Aggression Theory which argues that when there is a blockage of the attainment of one's personal or environmental goals, aggression may be inevitable. The paper concludes by examining psychological principles that can promote a smooth disengagement from terrorism as well as suggestions and recommendations to address this quagmire.

Keywords: Terrorism, Youth Unemployment, Aggression, Frustration

Introduction

Terrorism in Nigeria has taken on a different dimension in the last decades. Although the country is not new to terror-related attacks, its prevalence and the nature of weapons being used by these terror gangs now have created fear in the minds of the people. The scale and intensity of violence have increased in a spiral manner that has attracted a multidisciplinary approach toward a viable solution. Attempts have been made by scholars from various disciplines (Houghton, 2009) to identify causes of rising waves of terrorism in Nigeria.

Some of these include marginalization, corruption, poverty, youth unemployment, among others. However, irrespective of how and when it all started, the fact still remains that much has been said concerning this phenomenon. Several authors (Coleman, 2001; Horgan, 2005; Houghton, 2009) have presented many facts justifying terrorism, as well as its prevalence. An obvious paradox is the more talk there is about terrorism, the more reports of terrorist crimes dominate the headlines, be it in the press, on television or in the media at large - the less experts seem to have a grasp of what is happening.

By focusing (deliberately or otherwise) only on the selective features of terrorism such as legal and moral (Beetseh and Echikwonye, 2011), terrorist personality (Horgan, 2005), one might be misled into assuming the dominant relevance of a particular discipline, be it security studies, history, theology, psychology, sociology, political science or Black Studies. In this context, this paper attempts to examine terrorism from the perspective of Frustration Aggression Theory, and thus examines the social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1973); bringing to bear vicarious learning as well as reinforcement; juxtaposing an examination of the concept of terrorism in relationship to history (history of terrorism) and youth unemployment in Nigeria as a guide to terror disengagement.

The Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism, which has become a global phenomenon, is a deliberate and systematic use of violence designed to destroy, kill, maim and intimidate the innocent in order to achieve a goal or draw national/international attention to demands which ordinarily may be impossible or difficult to achieve under normal political negotiation (Horgan, 2005). Hence, the attractiveness of terrorism as a tactical tool easily attracts the attention of a target audience. is obvious. And according to Friedland and Merari (1985), terrorist violence is predicated on the assumption that apparently random violence can push the agenda of the terrorist onto an otherwise indifferent public's awareness, and when faced with the prospect of a prolonged campaign of terrorist violence, the public will eventually opt for an acceptance of the terrorist's demands. And interestingly, terrorism differs from mass killing or genocide in that the later focuses on killing an entire group, while terrorism focuses on killing only a few to influence a much wider audience. Unlike robbery and kidnapping, which are directed at individuals and are intended to extract money/material gains from victims, terrorism is directed at the state aiming at causing damage and mayhem (Attoh, 2012). Terrorists are attempting to communicate a message to some broader group of individuals, and, in that sense, those whom they kill are incidental to their cause. It is pertinent to state that terrorists do come from all socioeconomic classes, but the initial leadership tends to be held by middle-and-upper middle-class people (Horgan, 2005). The masses tend to be drawn from those with lower or working-class backgrounds, people also become terrorists through public appeals and personal contact Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, & Preston (2004).

When an individual joins an existing terrorist organization, there is usually a period of disassociation when previous social and emotional ties are loosened. For some people, this process is started after some dramatic change in life such as divorce, drug and alcohol abuse, or educational failure. Thus, understanding the personal motivations of those who join terrorist groups may be key to gaining insight into why people join them in the first place, and why they are driven to commit acts of violence against others. Certainly, the motivation and purpose of those groups who employ terrorist tactics can be overwhelming and confusing, especially when we begin to categorize them because terrorist groups vary greatly, not just in terms of their diverse motivations, but also in their size, capacity and resources, as well as in their national composition and cultural background.

The History of Terrorism in Nigeria

Historically, three waves of terrorist groups are discernible in Nigeria, depending on their focus and tactics. The first existed even before colonial rule, and although they were in forms of age-grades, guild associations and special interest groups; they performed one function or the other in the overall interest of their respective politics. Examples include *Ndinche*, *Modewa*, *Aguren*, *Eso*, *Akoda* and *Ilari* and so on (Coleman, 2001). The second wave relates to groups, essentially based on kinship affinity, with presence in every part of Nigeria, including the northern region, Fernando Po, and the Gold Coast (Coleman, 2001). As Coleman (2001) has noted, such groups were formed as people began moving from one area to the other in search of colonial jobs. As ethnic associations, they were based on strong loyalty and obligation to their kinship group, towns or villages. These associations were the organizational expression of strong, persistent feeling of loyalty and obligation to the kinship group, the town or village where the lineage is localized (Coleman, 2001). Such group included the Calabar Improvement League, Owerri Divisional Union, Igbira Progressive Union, Urhobo Renascent Convention, Naze Family Meeting, Ngwa Clan Union, Ijo Rivers People's League, Ijo Tribe Union, and a host of others.

There is a wide variety of targeting strategies and subsidiary activities to be found across the spectrum of terrorist organizations operating in the world today. In Nigeria, the Niger Delta terrorist groups (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People - MOSOP), the Egbesu Boys and Niger Delta Vigilante, have a long history dating back to the Adaka Boro Movement in the 1960s, through to Ken Saro Wiwa's struggles. In the East, the Bakassi Boys, Bakassi Movement for self-determination, Igbo People Congress, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), and MOSOP are terrorist groups fighting for one goal or the other. The Odua People's Congress (OPC) is the militant wing and mouthpiece of Egbe Omo Oduduwa, and is also used by dominant parties in the West to advance their courses and achieve sanity in the society.

The Arewa People's Congress (APC) in the North and the congregation of the People of the Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad better known as by its Hausa name Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden"), a Jihadist militant organization are based in Maiduguri in the northern part of Nigeria and thus, appear to be protecting the interests of the northerners (Okemi, 2013), and put together, it is essentially a militant agitation against environmental degradation, unemployment, poverty, deprivation and marginalization.

From the foregoing, domestic terrorism, i.e., acts that are: dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; designed to influence government policy by intimidation or coercion; affect the conduct of government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of Nigeria (in this case) has risen in Nigeria because of the emergence of militant groups who have taken advantage of government inefficient actions and inactions in dealing with the fundamental elements of nationhood, internal insecurity, corruption, youth unemployment, marginalization and so on (Obioma, 2012). These terrorist groups frequently participate in more obviously criminal activities such as extortion, theft, robbery, pipeline vandalization, as well as hostage taking. Thus, the terrorists use violence to achieve political change, and while motivations vary considerably across the plethora of groups we call terrorists, their principal methods remain remarkably similar.

Considering the above, the remaining part of this discussion will examine representative cases of the activities of a few of the above groups and associations in the 21st century. Beginning with the Odua People's Congress (OPC), on 20 February 2001, two police officers and three members of the group were killed in clashes between the police and OPC members in Ikotun Egbe in Lagos, Nigeria after the police tried to disperse a gathering of the OPC that was considered illegal (Attoh, 2012).. And by 2001, newspaper reports were replete with stories of the inhuman treatment, extrajudicial killings and human rights violations perpetrated by the Bakassi Boys in Abia state (Attoh, 2012), however, irrespective of the claims of controlling crime and criminality, the activities of the Bakassi Boys (Abia) included arson, kidnapping, extra-judicial killings, looting, unlawful detention and disappearances. Hence, the police, and sometimes the communities, are in no doubt that these groups are more of a menace than a partner in curbing crime and criminality, or fighting for ethnic goals.

Organizations such as Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and many other groups in the Niger-Delta are famous for hostage taking, kidnapping for ransom, pipeline vandalization, oil-theft, arson and ambush. To date, hundreds of oil workers, politicians, actors, children, and other important personalities have either been kidnapped, or taken hostage.

And initially, the groups and associations argued that kidnapping and hostage taking were introduced to force experts involved in crude oil exploration in the Niger-Delta areas to pressurize Nigerian government to take decisive steps towards ameliorating the environmental, social and political problems bedeviling the area, but more recently, the trends and patterns of hostage taking and kidnapping differ markedly from those using as proxies to attract government's attentions, as the groups focus more on the ransom paid to ensure the release of the oil industry workers. And therefore, foreign nationals irrespective of whether they work in the oil industry or anywhere near the oil-producing areas or not constitute part of their targets, based on the primary intention that when such people are captured or kidnapped, their relatives and embassies would pay whatever amount to ensure their release.

In January 2007, four foreign oil workers were abducted at a Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) location in Bayelsa State (Ebun-Amun, 2010). In the early hours of Saturday February 18, Ijaw youth launched a series of coordinated and devastating commando-like attacks on specifically selected and strategically located oil facilities and installations in western Niger Delta (Ebun-Amun, 2010). In March of the same year, Ijaw youth took hostage nine expatriate oil workers, while by April, thirteen expatriates were abducted in Port Harcourt, and altogether, more than five thousand foreigners, most of whom are from America, Britain, Thailand, Egypt, and the Philippines had been kidnapped and taken hostage by Niger-Delta groups which signaled a new dimension in what is happening in the Niger-Delta as youth were ready to tell the world that the Nigerian government had lost control over what is happening within its borders, especially in the oil rich Niger Delta.

Before 2008, no group or organization ever dared to engage the Nigerian army in any form of confrontation. For instance, in December 1999, when 12 policemen were brutally murdered by suspected Ijaw youth at Odi in Bayelsa State, the Nigerian military sacked the entire town of Odi (Attoh, 2012). Similar actions have occurred in Jesse, Jos, and one other places in northern Nigeria. But now, the youth are confronting the federal government and striking where it matters most: oil, the economic nerve center of Nigeria. As leader of MEND and most wanted militant in the Niger Delta, Ekpemupolo, aka Tompolo, said that these coordinated attacks are because they are ready to "take their future in their own hands," (Okemi, 2013) actions, which have since forced the Nigerian government to set in motion processes for negotiation that ultimately resulted in the on-going amnesty programme.

Since the beginning of 2008, kidnapping and hostage taking have ascended new heights, and many Nigerian politicians, university lecturers, kings and their chiefs, musicians and movie industry workers have been featured among the kidnapped (Ebun-Amun, 2010), to show that anyone can be kidnapped. And more often than not, kidnappers and hostage-takers hardly kill their victims, although a number of deaths have been recorded.

Thus, whenever a person is kidnapped, the family, company or embassy of the country of the victim is notified, and a price is placed on his or her head and quoted based on the worth of the victim. And if a renowned personality with clout in government or oil magnate or, better still, children of any of these is kidnapped, the price is usually high. The geography of kidnapping for ransom has also changed from Niger-Delta to Lagos, Ibadan to Kadunna, and Adamawa to Ekiti with different people male and female, old and young beeing kidnapped in addition to a high spate of violence, killings and bombing recently in the northern part of Nigeria. And notwithstanding, Ebun-Amun (2010) argues that the new trend of bombing portend danger, even though it was foreseeable and avoidable.

Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Unemployment is the primary target of every sensible nation's economic policy, but Nigerian policy makers seem quite content on trumpeting and celebrating jobless growth (El-Rufai, 2012). And according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigerian unemployment rate increased to 23.9% in 2011 compared with 21.1% in 2010 and 19.7% in 2009 (see Fig. 1), and the NBS also reports that "in computing the unemployment rate, the total population is divided into labour force (currently active) and non-labour force (not currently active) (NBS, 2013)" as the labour force population covers persons aged 15-64 years, and therefore, the definition of unemployment covers persons (15-64 years) who, during the reference period, were currently available for work, seeking work but were without work as the analysis of employment data for the past five years show that the rate of new entrants into the labour market has not been uniform as the rate was on the increase from 2007 to 2009, but declined significantly from 2009 to 2010, and increased again from 2010 to 2011. Hence, within the five years period, there has been an average of about 1.8 million new entrants into the active labour market per year" (NBS, 2013), which in the real senses of it, portrays a serious problem for the nation since the larger percentage of these entrants are youth.

The Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) has also drew attention of the federal government to the worsening rate of youth employment in the country (Nnodim, 2012). Specifically, the youth employment rate in Nigeria has been found to be over 5% of the total population, and Odidi (2012) observed that the unemployment rate in Nigeria is spiraling, driven by the wave of millions of young people entering the workforce every year with only a small fraction being able to find formal employment. And furthermore, according to Osalor (2012), this rising tide and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in Africa have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agent's provocateurs, and therefore it is clearly evident that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness, resulting in disastrous consequences (Nnodim, 2012).

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN NIGERIA

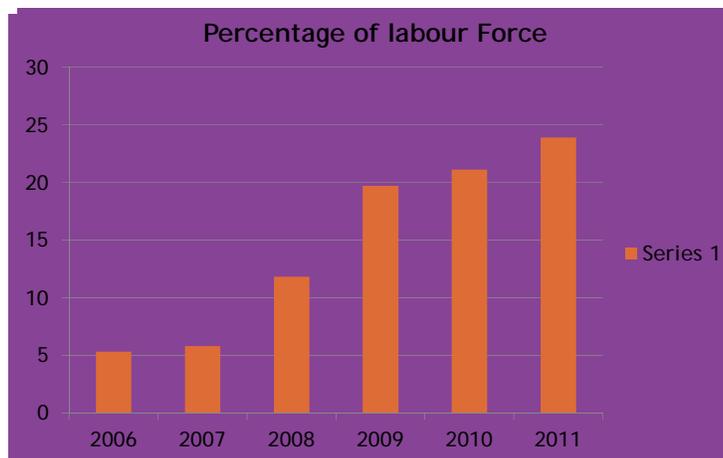


Fig. 1. Unemployment rate in Nigeria between 2006 and 2011

Youth unemployment is potentially dangerous as it threatens the sustainability of a nation's economy, and sends disturbing signals to the global environment. And thus, it has severe and damaging effects on young people as they suffer low-esteem, expulsion from mainstream society and impoverishment as they are also susceptible to all manner of vices and other forms of illicit behaviors.

Youth Psychology and Terrorism

Human beings are not only a product of internal compositions, but also of external influences as well. Thus, behaviours are determined by either a combination of these factors. Fleming (1961) opined that one cannot fully describe the individual in terms of prevalent mental state or dominant bodily impulse alone, but also by their interactions with significant others who continue to impact their behavioural dispositions, and the youth of Nigeria are no exception. According to Bandura (1973), they too learn by imitation and since they will always learn from adults as they grow, they have seen the military run people from the streets with blaring sirens, and perhaps want to be like that man who is benefiting from this violent disposition. And they also know that within the context of Nigeria, it is only the rich who enjoy and receive justice, and even if a person is innocent of an offence and does not have money, he or she may be denied justice.

Very often, youth are described as full of youthful exuberance, a raw energy that has of late, been channeled into unwholesome and socially unacceptable ventures that threaten the very fabric of the community, and once the youth are mobilized for nefarious activities, they become uncontrollable and the society suffers. Kidnapping, armed robbery and even militancy in the Niger Delta, and to some extent, the Boko Haram menace could be identified as some of the negative outcomes of youth unemployment (*This Day Live*, 2013), although they are also the wellspring of ideas for innovation which would spur economic, political and social growth, if they are gainfully engaged in society.

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon; therefore, a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary to increase the chances of success, especially if past acts of terror were not punished. And in regard to rewarding those who take up arms against the state with the cash hand-outs called ‘amnesty program’ has to be reviewed (El-Rufai, 2012), it was an initiative of the Nigerian government to provide an alternative means of livelihood for those who were once involved in the Niger Delta militant campaigns in the form of formal training, apprenticeship or monthly stipend. But then, any society that rewards negative behaviour with cash creates a moral hazard that may consume society which buttresses the position of Albert Bandura in his theory of Vicarious Learning that propose that human beings learn by observation and imitation, and therefore, when we observe an individual being rewarded for a terrorist attack, there is the possibility we might want to exhibit such behavior, believing that the same reward will follow our action.

Traditionally, justice in Nigeria and in Africa generally was a positive virtue. Cheats were not allowed to remain in society once caught, and in most cases, justice was done openly with the culprit subjected to sanctions ranging from capital punishment to being totally ostracized from the community. During this pre-colonial era, members of society (including the youth) of every community behaved themselves within the acceptable norms of the community. Then, the adage in local language “*oruko rere dara ju wura lo*” loosely translated to mean “a good name is better than gold” was embraced by all citizenry, and was largely imprinted in their psychic wherein youth were always ready to expend their energies on something that will bring a good name to them and their family. Gradually there was a change, and previously unacceptable behaviours began to be seen as the norm as there seemed to be no justice in sight, a reality the youth followed and today as the children yesterday did, they started to look for a quick means to amass wealth through fraudulent ways like corruption, the mismanagement of public funds and extortion they learned from corrupt adults.

Thus, this increasing spate of corruption and injustice coupled with a high regard for the wealthy has adversely eroded great virtues that those before us held in high esteem wherein money has replaced the virtue of hard work normally referred to in Yoruba as “*apalara*.” Hence, money is held too high, surpassing every other virtue in pursuit of survival as people opt for the embezzlement of public funds to get “big” money as unfortunately a corruption, inequality and unemployment cocktail gives birth to violent crime and terrorism in present-day Nigeria (Bakare, 2013).

Frustration-Aggression Theory

When scholars attempt to understand the activities of terrorists using psychological models, they traditionally draw upon a variety of psycho-analytic theories like ‘Frustration Aggression Theory’, a theory that suggests that social movements are born when frustration leads to collective, often aggressive behavior and thus frustration has a variety of sources and can take two forms from the absolute, which happens when people do not have enough to survive; when people have enough to survive but have less than those around them (although researchers have been unable to link social movements with observed frustration levels) and ‘Narcissistic Rage Theory’, a theory based on a reaction to narcissistic injury, which is a perceived threat to a narcissist’s self-esteem or self-worth that occurs on a continuum from instances of aloofness, and expression of mild irritation or annoyance, to serious outbursts, including violent attacks, constant anger, and self-aimed wrath. And additionally, they have also utilized psychoanalytically rooted explanations in an attempt to explain why people become terrorists. Hence, all these approaches are dispositionist in character (Houghton, 2009), first developed by Dollard and his colleagues (Dollard, 1939) that approach terrorism as being inherent in an individual and that frustration always leads to aggression and when applied to terrorism, the terrorist act is a form of “displacement” which wears a Freudian or psychoanalytic root to further suggest that the abnormal personalities of terrorists stem from their personal frustration with their lives which drive them to engage in acts of extreme violence against others. And in juxtaposition, the frustration of a person’s goals seem to play an obvious role in terrorist activity, especially when the political make up of a country allows no other outlet for “normal” agitation for those needs

Consequently, in the context of Nigeria, we argue that the frustration-aggression theory is most useful because it agrees with a Yoruba proverb which says “*ebi kii wonu ki oro me wo’be*” loosely translated to mean “an hungry man is an angry man” which we suggest is simply a process of being human when the psychological needs of an individual is not satisfied and he or she works to satisfy a particular need or want.

And in short, for Nigeria to survive there must be a psychological and physical disengagement from terrorism. In the psychological stage, Post (1993) argues that in the mind of the terrorist there is an “underlying the need to belong is an incomplete or fragmented psychosocial identity, so that the only way the member feels reasonably complete is in relationship to the group; belonging to the group becomes an important component of the member’s self-concept”, and thus this orientation has to change for proper disengagement. However, the process of a person disengaging from a terrorist group may be a difficult task as observed by Brockner and Rubin (1985) as they developed the notion of psychological traps that refer to continued terrorist group membership in order to attain a set of goals, although some goals may continue to be a distant realization. At this point, the individual experiences a decisional crisis and reaches a crossroads, and thus the investment of time, energy and hope may seem too large (especially when combined with the intense pressures one must bear as a result of membership) given other circumstances to continue in the absence of a readily attainable goals while withdrawal would mean the abandonment of what has gone on before, and the individual may feel a commitment only to personally justify the investment already made. And in addition, the ability to walk the streets or simply engage in a romantic relationship is another personal factor that may facilitate the beginning of a phase of psychological disengagement. And second, the physical disengagement from terrorism might involve apprehension by security services, perhaps with subsequent imprisonment; being ejected from the movement (e.g for improper use of arms, money, or disrespectful behaviour that warrants dismissal, or in simply as in the psychological stage, a change in priority (Horgan, 2005).

Concluding Remarks and Suggestions

Considering the above, Nigeria is in a state of crisis as unemployment among its youth is fuelling the insurgency of terrorism as the world waits for a solution or at least a resolution, although several efforts had been made by the government of Nigeria to tackle terrorism including amnesty, declaration of state-of-emergency and recently, and the United States government promise to help Nigeria to end terrorism by offering a \$7 million reward to persons with information on the whereabouts of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Jama’atu Ahl as-Sunnah il-Da’awati wal-Jihad (more commonly known as Boko Haram), a Nigeria-based terrorist organization that seeks to overthrow the current Nigerian government and replace it with a regime based on Islamic law (on April 14, 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped close to 300 girls from their school in the town of Chibok in northeastern Nigeria), youth unemployment via frustration aggression is fueling a dangerous fire in need of extinction.

In the words of former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who claims the obvious, “we cannot stop terrorism or defeat the ideologies of violent extremism when hundreds of millions of young people see a future with no jobs, no hope and no way ever to catch up to the developed world” (Clinton, 2012). Indeed, there is an urgent need for massive job creation to meaningfully engage this mammoth of unemployed youth, a project that we believed will reduce terror and terrorist attacks in Nigeria.

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