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STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC FRAGILITY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FOURTH REPUBLIC NIGERIA

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Abstract

Democracy represents the mass participation of citizens in governance. However, since the advent of Fourth Republic Nigeria in 1999, it has been confronted with myriads of challenges principal among which is that of violence in various shades and dimensions. This ranges from socio-economic violence, political violence to structural violence. This paper investigates the challenge of structural violence and its implication on democratic fragility in Nigeria since the commencement of the Fourth Republic. The paper adopted the theory of conflict transformation, human needs theory, and the theory of positive and negative peace which find relevance in Galtung's work on "violence, peace and peace research" to anchor this research. One common denominator to these theories is the clear distinction made between direct violence and structural violence. The paper employed the qualitative methodological approach which relied mainly on secondary source of data from journals/articles, library and archival materials, among others. The paper found that because of structural deficiency of the Nigerian State, violence have been entrenched in it through provision by government, of an unequal playing field for its citizens which translate into unequal life chances. The paper therefore concluded that Nigerian citizens have vital role to play by calling on government to account for every policy action. It is in this regard that this paper recommended the urgent need to revisit and rework the 1999 constitution so as to address the challenge of structural violence and democratic fragility being experienced by the Nigerian state.

Keywords: Democracy, Structural Violence, Fragility, Nigerian State, Fourth Republic.

Introduction

Democracy which commenced in Nigeria in 1999 was the fourth attempt at democratisation experience since it attained independence in 1960. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic Nigeria, it has been confronted with myriads of challenges prominent among which is that of violence in various forms. This ranges from socio-economic violence, political violence to structural violence. This paper interrogates structural violence as a causal variable of democratic fragility being experienced in Nigeria since the advent of Fourth Republic Nigeria. Violence as it were, can be regarded as a ubiquitous concept found in every political system. However, the intensity of such violence differs from one country to another. It is this degree of intensity that separates the developed democracies from the developing ones. For instance, while the developed democracies have established institutions that prevent almost always bring the tendencies for violent acts under control, developing democracies have gone further to build elements that provoke violence into its structures which promote democratic fragility. Given the above scenario, one can begin to categorise the concept of violence as follows; political violence, socio-economic violence, physical/direct violence, and structural violence. Political violence has to do with every form of violence that is political in nature. For instance,

violence that occurs before, during and after elections is categorised as political violence. Economic violence is state induced as it emanates from policy implementation by government that result into mass impoverishment, hunger and starvation of its citizens. Physical/direct violence deals with the infliction of injuries on victims by the violators.

Structural violence and how it promotes democratic fragility which is the main thrust of this paper is built into the structures of the state in the form of provision of unequal playing field by the state for its citizens. The direct consequence of this misdemeanour is that citizens do not have equal opportunities in the area of access to employment, scholarship grants and other social interventions among others which the state provide for its citizens. According to Galtung (1969) in Anifowoshe (2011), "violence could be direct or structural". As he further argued, "While direct violence is the infliction of physical injury, structural violence is embedded in state structure". According to him, "in structural violence, the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances". The implication of this conception of violence is daunting to the extent that structural violence has become entrenched in the configuration and design of the Nigerian state and shows up in nearly all sectors of the political economy.

It is in this regard that this paper interrogates the subject of structural violence and democratic fragility in Nigeria with the aim of finding probable solution that can jump start a Nigerian state where equal opportunities are provided for citizens irrespective of tribe, ethnicity or religious affiliation.

Statement of the Problem

The history of structural violence in Nigeria dated back to the period following the takeover of government by the military. Prior to the era of military interregnum, Nigerian state was regionalised and this gave opportunity to every region to develop at its own pace. However, with the coming into the political arena of the military, the constitution which gave impetus for a regionalised Nigerian state structure was abrogated and a unitary system of government was foisted on the Nigerian state. This was the genesis of how structural violence was built into the structure of the country and gave opportunity for a section of the polity to lord it over the rest. This is made manifest in the area of appointment into juicy government offices, job opportunities for its citizens, provision of infrastructural facilities and other forms of social interventions. Experience over the years have shown that a section of the country benefits more from the provision of these opportunities earlier mentioned than the other section who always feel cheated, marginalised, traumatised, denigrated and oppressed. The multiplier effect of these is the manifest frustration and aggression being displayed by citizens who falls into the category of the cheated and the marginalised.

It is therefore not any surprise why the challenge of structural violence has gone a long way to promote democratic fragility in Nigeria. This is why the popular call for the restructuring of Nigerian state has continued to resonate.

Literature Review

Honderich (2003) in Bufacchi (2007) defines violence as "a use of physical force that injures, damages, violates or destroys people or things". Stegar (2003) in Bufacchi (2003), points out that "violence comprise a range of meanings, including to force, to injure, to dishonour, and

to violate". Salmi (1993), approximate the conception of violence as already conveyed in the subject of this paper. According to him, "violence is any avoidable action that constitutes a violation of a human right, in its widest meaning, or which prevents the fulfilment of a basic human need". As he further argued, "each time human beings starve, or are undernourished because of social or political reasons it is legitimate to consider these people as the victims of social violence". In case and for the purpose of this paper, it categorises victims of such violation as that of structural violence.

Geras (1990), defined violence as "the exercise of physical force so as to kill or injure, inflict direct harm or pain on human beings". This definition, according to Bufacchi (2007), constitute a category of the 'minimalist' conception of violence; while definitions which captures the violation of citizens' right to good life falls into the category of 'comprehensive' conception of violence. Kaase and Neidhardt (1990) in Imbusch (2003), observed that "public polls reveal that the concept of violence is extremely diffuse extending from physical and psychological injury, particular forms of crime and uncouth behaviour on the roads and in sports, to socio-political discrimination". However, for the purpose of this paper, attention is focussed on the structural dimension of violence which can also be found in the socio-political realm of violence. Imbusch (2003) described violence as "the movement of carrying extreme force towards an object with the aim of destroying it". Again, this conception of violence does not really fits into the focus of this paper which has to do with structural violence and democratic fragility. The impact of structural violence as it were, is psychological in nature. However, Imbusch conception of violence becomes applicable when physical/direct violence is being discussed.

Kalu and Gberevbe (2018) in Aluko (2022) saw violence as "a pervasive phenomenon in every society and every sphere of life". Ayeni-Akeke (2008) observed that "violence from inception has been a major part of human existence as they from time immemorial have tendencies to exhibit violent acts, especially politics related violence that varies from one political system to another". The version of violence introduced and built into the Nigerian political system is structural in design and it has gone a long way to affect negatively, the psyche of majority of its citizens.

Anifowoshe (2011) in Aluko (2022) argued that "violence is interpreted as illegal and illegitimate when it is carried out by non-governmental individuals and groups". However, this conception of violence is lopsided because structural violence can be said to be illegitimate but has become legitimised by the state. WHO (1996) in Morris (2007) defined violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power threatened or actual against oneself, another person, or a group, or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation". This definition is all encompassing as it captures both physical/direct and structural forms of violence.

Vorobej (2008) define structural violence as "a form of violence that results in harm but is not caused by a clearly identifiable actor". The most celebrated discourse on structural violence is Galtung's (1969) landmark essay titled *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.* According to him, "structural violence is embedded in state structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances". This definition is apt particularly as it relates to the Nigerian state. For instance, while physical or direct violence is relevant during periods of

elections, sporting activities, social and political gatherings, structural violence had been built into the Nigerian state as mentioned earlier to the extent that inequality and injustice have become one of the "derivative principle" of the state.

According to Aluko (2022), democratic fragility can be understood within the framework of the following variables; weak political culture, lopsided political socialisation, insecurity of lives and properties, pervasive political intolerance, growing political apathy, weak institutional outlay, among others. All these can be captured as flowing from structural defect of the Nigerian state which is a derivative of an entrenched structural violence. Grotenhuis (2016) perspective to the concept of fragility enabled his employment of "the descriptive approach". Borrowing from the Department for International Development (DFID) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), he labelled a state as fragile, "when the government cannot and will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people including the poor". According to him, "OECD define a state as fragile "when state structures lack the political will and/or capacity to provide basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and the human rights of their population". Given the foregoing conception of a fragile state, it is little wonder why the Nigerian "pretending democracy" has continued to attract the label of fragility and as a result majority of its citizens are disillusioned, bewildered, confused, marginalised and oppressed. This must not be allowed to continue if Nigeria as a country must remain as one.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have interrogated structural violence and observed that it constitute a major cause of democratic fragility in developing countries. In this regard, Makonye and Bengesai (2020) identified the theories of conflict transformation, negative and positive peace, and human needs to situate the challenges of structural violence as it affects elections. According to them, "conflict transformation theory deals with social justice issues and identity, livelihoods and political power sharing, the aim is being to achieve institutional and structural transformation in the end". On human needs, theorists have argued that "conflicts and violent conflicts are caused by unmet human needs". The frustration/aggression theory finds relevance here. Dollard, etal (1939) in Aluko (2022) argued that "aggression is always the consequence of frustration". When human needs and expectations are not met especially by the society they belong, the end result has always been violent conflicts.

The third theory identified by Makonye and Bengesai (2020) is that of positive and negative peace. This theory constitutes a direct version of Galtung's (1969) work in which he distinguished between direct violence and structural violence. According to him," violence can be likened to an iceberg model". As he further explained, "while direct violence is visible, structural and cultural violence are not visible". It can therefore be inferred that the tip of the iceberg is direct violence which can be seen on the surface while the bigger part is embedded below the water line and remains invisible. This constitutes the aspect of structural violence.
The above explains the intricacies of structural violence in Nigeria. While much attention have been paid to physical/direct violence over the years because it can be seen, very little attention is focussed on structural violence and this has done incalculable damage to the Nigerian political structure hence its democracy and its inability to consolidate. It is in this regard that this paper adopts the theories of conflict transformation, human needs, and positive/negative peace to anchor the study. It is believed that these theories intertwined and explained lucidly,

the intricacies embedded in the subject of structural violence and democratic fragility in Nigeria.

Methodology

The paper adopted a qualitative methodological approach which relied mainly on secondary source of data from journals/articles, online news channels, library and archival materials, among others.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Violence has been part of history of mankind. It is little wonder why in every society; there are traces of one form of violence or another. This paper interrogates structural violence and its implications on democratic fragility in Nigeria. During the course of interrogation of literature, the following findings were discovered;

First, as a result of structural deficiency of the Nigerian state, violence became entrenched into the political structure through governmental provision of unequal playing field for its citizens. This gave rise to a bunch of citizens who had to play a second fiddle because of inaccessibility to juicy political appointments, employment opportunities, social interventions, scholarship grants, among others. Citizens from a particular section of the country are preferentially treated at the detriments of other nationalities. It is therefore not any surprise the growing level of agitations among the citizens which had prompted the call for the restructuring of the Nigerian state lately.

Secondly, the paper found the incursion of the military into the Nigerian political space as the genesis of structural violence in Nigeria. For instance, since the military interregnum of January 15, 1966 Nigerian state has been skewed or designed to favour a section of the country. This can be seen from the way the constitution which emanated from the military has been drafted. The constitution which has been variously described as fraudulent became an imposition of the opinion of few over the majority of Nigerians.

Thirdly, the paper found that weak political culture, insecurity, pervasive corruption, political apathy, weak institutional outlay, among others constitute major factors why the effect of structural violence in Nigerian political system and its democracy have been so daunting. As a result, citizens that have the advantage of having access to the commonwealth, pilfer, pillage and plunge the wealth of the state with impunity thus denying others their rights and privileges.

Furthermore, this study revealed that though every form of violence is presupposed to be negative in nature, the Nigerian state has legitimised structural violence to the extent that the constitution permitted its entrenchment through the back door of quota system. This has gone a long way to put a section of the country to have unfair share of placements in the educational sector and other sphere of the political economy.

Finally, the paper found that while direct violence is relevant to elections, sporting activities and other physical socio-political engagements, structural violence had been entrenched in the Nigerian state to the extent that social inequality and injustice have become one of "of the derivative principles of the state". This is why people from a section of the country sees

themselves as superior to others hence their carriage in the public space as one "born to rule" forever.

The paper therefore concludes that citizens from other parts of the Nigerian state have a duty to wake up and demand for their right in the aspect of making a clarion call on government to account for every policy action. It is in this regard that it recommends as follows: there is the need to revisit and rework the 1999 constitution which was the making of the military hierarchy; the report of 2014 national conference under the regime of Goodluck Jonathan must be brought out of the shelf where it has been gathering dust for immediate implementation; there is also the need to restructure the Nigerian state so as to reflect the peculiarity of each section of the country and at the same time, guarantee their fiscal autonomy. Nigerian state in this regard must be seen as truly federal.

It is only when these measures are put in place that the challenge of structural violence and democratic fragility confronting Nigeria can be fully captured and addressed. A stitch in time saves nine.

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