



ARRESTING SOCIAL INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: THE IMPERATIVE OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of indigenous communication systems in ensuring social security in Nigeria. It posits that the best approach to arrest social insecurity in Nigeria is to restore the cherished value system of the various ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria. In doing this, emphasis should be on the use of a communication approach that has many things in common with the value system of the people. Hence, the choice of indigenous communication systems and among the different forms of these communication systems, the institutional form is unique in prosecuting a campaign for social change, including the one being examined. Thus, the role of endogenous institutional media like traditional rulers, age groups, masquerade institutions and religious institutions, among others, in achieving social security in Nigeria are examined.

Keywords: Arresting social insecurity, Role and Indigenous communication system.

INTRODUCTION

The bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D. C. heralded the worst terrorist attacks in recent times. Since then, many countries of the world have been facing acts of terrorism. Today, terrorism is the worst form of social insecurity confronting humanity. From the Middle East to the Western world, from the northern hemisphere to the southern region, the world is groaning under the excruciating power of the worst enemy of our time – terrorism. Udou and Diriyai (2012) chronicled recent terrorist attacks in the world to include suicide bombings in the Middle East, bombing of an international hotel in Indonesia, bombing of trains in the transit in some countries of the world, among others.

The manner in which acts of terrorism spread in Nigeria is astonishing to everybody. [Udoudo and Diriyai \(2012\)](#) observe that terrorism seems to have a very rapid, but infamous spread in Nigeria. The acts of terrorism that have occurred in Nigeria include bombings of oil installations in the Niger Delta, kidnapping of oil workers, Abuja bombing of 1st October 2010, the 2010 Christmas eve bombing in Jos, the bombing in Suleja and Maiduguri during the 2011 general elections and bombing of the Force Headquarters in Abuja on 16th June 2011, to mention a few. Each of these terrorist attacks leaves behind it, destruction of human and material resources of unimaginable proportions. For example, on Thursday, 16th June, 2011 a suicide bomber attacked the Force Headquarters in Abuja claiming 15 lives and destroying 75 cars ([Udoudo and Diriyai, 2012](#)).

Terrorism is not the only act of social insecurity in Nigeria; kidnapping is the twin sister of terrorism in Nigeria. It is on record that in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, restive youths kidnap oil workers and demand for ransom before releasing them. In the South East, the picture is horrifying. The inglorious, social stench activities of “Osisikankwu”, “Stone” and “Tallest” in Aba, Abia State present a sarcastic admiration of the kidnapping industry in Nigeria. Elsewhere, in Onitsha, Nnewi, Benin and Oraifite (to mention a few), the business of kidnapping is thriving. Of-course, government, at all levels, is fighting this malignant tumour. Causes of social insecurity in Nigeria include armed robbery, bank robbery, human trafficking and ritual killing. These social problems need to be tackled in order to foster social security in Nigeria.

Types of Social Insecurity

Human history is awash of several types of social insecurity. Writing specifically about terrorism, [Udoudo and Diriyai \(2012\)](#) identify five types of terrorism; these are:

1. Religion-related terrorism
2. Ethnic driven terrorism
3. Politically driven terrorism
4. Hate-driven terrorism
5. Socio-economic driven terrorism

Religion-related Terrorism

This type of terrorism occurs in the religious front. [Isichei \(1995\)](#) reports that the various reforms associated with Christianity came with the execution of church leaders due to doctrinal disagreement. Among the major religions of the world, inter-religious terrorism still lingers. [Udoudo and Diriyai \(2012\)](#) state that Islamic intra-religious terrorism of Maitasine sect destroyed many lives in Bauchi and many other places in Northern Nigeria. The authors observed that sometimes, the intra-religious terrorism metamorphose into inter-religious terrorism in Nigeria. For example, in Gwande, Niger State, youths set three houses ablaze and 26 persons were injured during Easter celebration. During the same Easter celebration in Minna, capital of Niger State, a Baptist Church was attacked resulting in physical injuries on five persons and damaging of five

cars. Scholars such as [Ashong and Udoudo \(2010\)](#) have condemned in strong terms the use of public communication by religious Leaders to cause religious terrorism in Nigeria.

Ethnicity Driven Terrorism

Ethno-religious terrorism creates fear and tension particularly among Nigerians living outside their ethnic region. [Isgogo et al. \(2009\)](#) have observed that because of ethno-religious terrorism, Nigerians feel insecure in regions other than theirs. This ethno-religious terrorism has become a regular occurrence in Jos, Plateau State, leading to incessant killings and destruction of property. Ethnicity driven terrorist attack in one part of Nigeria sometimes results in reprisal attacks in other parts of the country ([Ashong and Udoudo, 2010](#)). The reprisal attacks that occurred in Onitsha and Aba (in the South East Nigeria) immediately after the Kano, Bauchi and Kaduna acts of terrorism of 1993 following presidential election logjam is a case in point.

Socio-Economic Driven Terrorism

No doubt, Nigeria is a centre stage of socio-economic driven terrorist attacks. Agitation for fair share of the oil money by irate youths of the Niger Delta appears to be the starting point of socio-economic terrorism in Nigeria. This gradually developed into kidnapping of oil workers and bombing of oil installations in the region ([Jamiu, 2009](#)). Immediately after this the lucrative business of kidnapping spread to other parts of Nigeria, particularly the South East geo-political zone. The infamous trade boomed in the commercial nerve centres of Onitsha, Aba and Nnewi and such other areas as Osioma, Obingwa, Ukwu East and Ukwu West Local councils in Abia State as well as Oba, Oraifite and environs in Anambra State. This situation created terrible economic consequences for people living in the South-East and indeed Nigerians in general.

Politically Driven Terrorism

Nigeria has had a condemnable harvest of political terrorism in the past and present. These include the Boko Haram, a known, but unjustifiable enemy of Western education, seemingly headquartered in Maiduguri, North Eastern part of Nigeria. Since its notorious emergence, Maiduguri and indeed many parts of Northern Nigeria has not known peace. Boko Haram bombings have taken the centre stage, leading to massive destruction of lives and properties (Radio Nigeria, July 8, 2011). Aljazeera International (July 2011) reported that the politically induced terrorism which has engulfed the Arab nations for over two decades now has the capacity of threatening the global peace.

Hate-Drive Terrorism

Hate-driven terrorism is a terrorist act triggered off by hatred. At the global level, the terrorist attacks launched by Al Qaeda and other Islamic fundamentalists are good examples. Others include the Lockerbie plane bomb blast, aborted Abdul mutalib terrorist act of December 25, 2009, Nairobi and Dares Salam bombing in 1998 and the September 11, 2001 bomb attack of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon attack of the same year and period.

In Nigeria, hate-motivated terrorism attacks are many and varied. These include the infamous Boko Haram bombings in many parts of Northern Nigeria, Abuja bomb blast of 1st October 2010, the killing of many Nigerians of South-South, South-West and South-East ethnic origins in the North in 1993, 1995 and 2011. As noted by [Udoudo and Diriyai \(2012\)](#) hate-driven terrorism emanates from no significant purpose other than hate.

Other Forms of Insecurity

No doubt, other forms of social insecurity abound in Nigeria. Kidnapping which looms larger than life in the South Eastern part of the country is an example. Armed robbery and Bank robbery are also veritable sources of social unrest in Nigeria. Bank robbery has grown to a monster that in some cases in some towns in Nigeria banks do not open to provide services to customers because of fear of robbers. Whereas armed robbery cases occur in all parts of the country, bank robbery appears to be concentrated in the Southern part of the country. Cities like Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, Enugu, Benin (to name a few) and their environs have experienced sophisticated bank (or armed) robbery attacks in recent times. These robbery activities result in loss of lives and other devastating social and economic consequences.

Some writers have linked armed robbery to kidnapping. [Udoudo and Diriyai \(2012\)](#) posit that notable armed robbers graduate into kidnapping on discovery that the latter is more lucrative. Resolving social insecurity in Nigeria requires the use of communication approach that would guarantee lasting solution to the many social problems confronting Nigeria as a country. Indigenous channels of communication appear to be the best option in tackling these problems because of its emphasis on the restoration of the cherished value system of the people.

Indigenous Communication Systems in Nigeria

Communication is central to human life; it sustains and maintains human relationship and social interaction. It is the transfer of information from one person, context or group to another ([Akpan et al., 2013](#)).

Indigenous system of communication is seen as an admixture of social conventions and practices which have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems and which have almost become standard practices, modes of speech and social organisations whose chief concerns may not be with communication, but with other activities ([Wilson, 1997](#)). This implies therefore that indigenous communication system is any form of endogenous communication system, which by virtue of its origin, form and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilisation of the values, symbols, institutions and ethos of the host culture, through its unique qualities and attributes.

African traditional communication is embedded in the culture of the people ([Wilson 1990](#)) and it works along three principles: (1) It is part and parcel of the way of life of a people; (2) it utilises

symbolism from the community and hence readily connects with the people; and (3) values of the community, as well as, age-old institutions, come into play in the communication process.

The foregoing conceptualisation of indigenous communication is similar to the earlier notion of the term advanced by Frank Ugboajah, arguably, the first person that raised awareness to African traditional communication as a distinct area of communication in Africa. Ugboajah, cited in [Ebeze \(2002\)](#) sees indigenous communication as the products of the interplay between a traditional community's customs and conflicts, harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, culture specific tangibles, interpersonal relations, symbols and codes and moral traditions which include methodology, oral literature (proverbs, story-telling, poetry), masquerades, witchcraft, rites, rituals, music, dance, drama, costumes and similar abstractions and artifacts which encompass a people's factual, symbolic and cosmological existence from birth to death and even beyond death.

Along Ugboajah's postulations of traditional communication in Africa, scholars see a basis of classifying those systems of communication along the two major types of communication – verbal, and non-verbal. Hence, a number of scholars including [Ebeze \(2002\)](#), [Kombol \(2005\)](#) and [Ogwezzy \(2008\)](#) classify traditional communication systems into verbal and non-verbal systems. Verbal traditional communication systems, according to [Ebeze \(2002\)](#) include: market place, town crier, visits, church, and village square. [Kombol \(2005\)](#) differs from Ebeze in what constitute verbal traditional systems of communication. According to Kombol, the systems are: names of people, proverbs, riddles, narratives, simple commands, requests, exclamations, and statements. What is however imperative about verbal traditional systems of communication are that essentially language; and thought, feelings and words are the three important ingredients of language ([Kombol, 2005](#)). They are also direct contacts and are based on actions or word of mouth ([Ogwezzy, 2008](#)).

Non-verbal traditional communication, on the other hand, is described as being more than speaking. It has to do with sharing of meaning with others non-linguistically ([Rothwell, 2000](#)). [Ebeze \(2002\)](#) identifies the following as systems of non-verbal traditional communication: idiophones; membrane phones, aero phones, signals objectifics, colour scheme, music, extra-mundane communication and symbolic displays. [Ogwezzy \(2008\)](#) adds to the list to include physical appearance, hair, facial expression and gesture communication.

[Wilson \(1998\)](#) quoted in [Edegoh \(2009\)](#) classifies traditional communication systems into six broad categories based on insights and approximations on the subject. The categories are instrumental, demonstrative, iconographic, extramundane, visual, and institutional systems. Wilson further sub-classifies each of the six classes into sub-categories. Thus, he classifies instrumental media into idiophonic aerophonic, and membranophonic communication instruments. He classifies demonstrative media into music and signal modes of communication. Objectified and flora communication instruments make up iconographic media while colour and appearance make up

visual media. Extra-mundane is sub-classified into incantations, chant, ritual, prayers, sacrifices, invocation, vibration, conjuration, witchcraft, exorcism, vision and contemplation. All forms of social and spiritual institutions make up institutional media.

Apart from Wilson's six categories of traditional communication, there are other three categories; they are: (1) Myths and legends, (2) names as communication and (3) folk tales and proverbs. [Ogwezzy \(2008\)](#) adds natural phenomena as a category of traditional communication. There are other classifications of traditional communication systems based on different criteria. What is however imperative here is that there is no right or wrong classification. Each classification is right as long as it contributes to knowledge of the different systems of traditional communication in Africa. It is also pertinent to observe that traditional systems of communication are in most cases similar from one society to the other in Africa. [Wilson \(1998\)](#) notes this fact when he observed that similarities in traditional systems of communication cut across all of Nigeria, Cameroon and the West Coast of Africa with some slight variations in East and South Africa. Hence, all the traditional systems of communication examined in this chapter can be found in almost if not in all societies in Nigeria.

Role of Indigenous Communication Systems in arresting social Insecurity in Nigeria

Even though many aspects of African traditional communication systems, when consciously and appropriately used, are effective in campaigns for social change, none is as effective as institutional systems of traditional communication in attitude and behavioural change campaigns ([Edegoh, 2009](#)). This is not to say that the other systems of traditional communication are not effective in such campaigns; they are. It has been noted pertinently that the effectiveness of indigenous media is appreciated when the systems in the media are considered as a whole ([Udoakah, 1996](#)). In fact, the nature of indigenous media is in such a way that the channels are linked by a network of mutual dependencies. In other words, there is interdependent relationship among the different forms of indigenous communication. Elements of extra-mundane media are found in institutional media; elements of visual media are found in extra-mundane media and so on and so forth.

Institutional systems of indigenous communication, according to [Wilson \(1996\)](#), involve the use of cultural or traditional institutions to communicate symbolically, and as an extension of the extra-mundane mode of communication. [Wilson](#) also observes that the most important of such traditional institutions are marriage, chieftaincy, secret societies, shrines, masks and masquerades. Other important traditional institutions in Nigeria include traditional rulers, age grades, kingmakers, modern religious organizations, market women and many others. A discussion of the roles of the various traditional institutions in the war against social insecurity follows.

The Traditional Rulers' Institution

The traditional rulers' institution is so much cherished and very important in mobilising for social change. In almost every part of Nigeria, traditional rulers are being relied upon for diffusion of

innovations. In the same manner, traditional rulers can mobilise and persuade their subjects towards ethical values in society. The problem with some traditional rulers in recent times is that their credibility is waning, because they have allowed themselves to be government propaganda megaphones (Gambo and Aji, 2007). The restoration of the credibility and respect of such traditional rulers would give them that power to exercise full authority on its subjects; an authority that is usually very swift and effective. When traditional rulers are genuinely convinced of the need for a particular change, they explore all avenues to mobilise and persuade their subjects to adopt the change.

Talking about traditional rulers' institution, mention has to be made of the efficiency of traditional form of government in bringing about a conducive society. In Igbo society, for example, the government of a community is organised in two broad ways: (1) The assemblies and (2) the societies. Within the assemblies is found the general assembly, the men's assembly and the married women assembly. There are basically three types of societies: (1) The title holders' society; (2) the age-group societies, and (3) the married daughters' society (*Umu-okpu, Umu-ada*). These different groups meet to discuss and ensure the development of the area. Mmuo (1998) identifies the benefits of such meetings:

Matters treated at meetings usually concern the social welfare and development of the community, settlement of disputes among members, arrangement for feasts and title-taking and manners of procedure in matters connected with other communities or societies. The societies of elders and titled men treat the religious and ritual-political matters separately at their private meetings.

The *Ozo* title, as a machinery of government in traditional Igbo society, is an important institution in bringing about peace and tranquility in the society. Ezikeanyi (1997) holds that the individual who has taken the *Ozo* title must live a holy life, uphold publicly and private the morality of the land and observe all the taboos, and religious ceremonies of his community. Ezikeanyi further describes the *Ozo* title for the Igbo as enforcing the whole Ten Commandments.

These aspects of traditional government exists in virtually all ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, and can be effectively used to curb society vices as a way or arresting social insecurity in the country.

The Masquerade Institution

The masquerade in most societies in Nigeria served an entertainment function. But beyond that it serves to regulate society. In Igbo society, for example, the masquerade promotes social control in the community in many ways. One way the masquerade does this, as noted by Onyeneke (1997), is that with the strong appeal it has on children and young people, and the impression it makes on

them, the masquerade serves the primary function of introducing people from infant stage to the dominant values and belief systems of the Igbo society.

Similarly, as a tangible symbol of the community will, the masquerade can be engaged by the community as a police force for enforcing concrete decisions, and by-laws made by the community. Onyeneke advises that rules made to promote community development, such as communal labour to build a market place or a school, etc. can be directly handed over to a village masquerade to supervise. Also, general security measures to protect the village can be handed over to the masquerade institution to enforce. With the awe and sacredness credited to this institution, the village masquerade, in the words of Onyeneke (1997), “can become a sort of ready-made contrivance *deus ex machine*- that can be called upon according to need to compel anyone, young or old, by force to comply with any stipulated regulation made by the community.”

In extreme cases of deviant behaviour, invisible masquerades go further and secretly lynch someone regarded as a serious threat to community life – maybe a notorious thief or a miscreant that is perceived to place the life of the community in a precarious situation. This may be too crude and unlawful, but the fear of it is enough to make members of a community uphold the virtues of that community (Edegoh, 2009).

With this functional value of the masquerade in society, it could be appropriately used to curtail abnormal practices such as terrorism, armed robbery and kidnapping. The problem is that the traditional masquerade institution is being abused today. These days we see masquerades terrorizing innocent members of the community. Some go to the extent of extorting and snatching money from people. On the other hand too, it is observed that masquerades in some cases are no more held in awe and given that respect they deserve as sacred beings. In some cases masquerades are unmasked (something that is supposed to be an abomination), thereby desecrating this cherished traditional institution. A number of factors are responsible for this. These factors, as emphasized by Oloko (N.D), are products of modernization process, and include: political modernization, colonialism, western education, advent of Christianity, and the craze for materialism among others.

Any thought of using the masquerade as an instrument of social change (and the campaign for social security is a search for social change) must begin with the restoration of the sacredness and value of the masquerade in society.

Age Group Institution

In traditional societies in Nigeria, age group institution was widespread and very much cherished. Every person in the community, man and women, had an age group. Kur (2008) has written extensively on the socio-economic and political value of age group institution in Tiv land. According to Kur, age group in traditional Tiv society, referred to as *Mbakwagh*, carried out

judicial functions by settling disputes among members of a community. One such dispute *Mbakwagh* settled was assault on elders and constituted authority, and refusal to comply with elders' decisions. The *Mbakwagh* would arrest such an accused, try him or her, and when found guilty, the culprit is chastised and fined. In addition, the culprit is made to publicly apologise and thereafter to obey the decision he had hitherto defied. In extreme cases of disobedience, *Mbakwagh* could send the culprit on exile and enforce it. The *Mbakwagh* in Tiv society, even today, discourages laziness, immorality, dishonesty and other vices that could arise in society.

The age group institution in many other communities in Nigeria discharges similar or almost similar functions. This institution can be galvanized and utilized to contribute meaningfully to the smooth running of the different communities that make up Nigeria, thereby contributing meaningfully to the campaign against social insecurity.

Religious Institutions

Every community in Nigeria subscribes to one form of religious belief or the other; the common thing in the different religious beliefs is that they all believe in one supernatural being – God. This God is the source of all we do, live for and have. He can punish for any wrong done and reward for any good done. The three major religions in Nigeria – Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion – preach one thing, and that is to do good. And most Nigerians are very religious, living in a totally religious environment, and motivated in many of their actions by religious influences and impulses internally and externally. Campaign messages about the need for social security will readily get to the people and likely persuade them when religious institutions are used. The custodians of the religions (Priests and Imams) could serve as effective opinion leaders in the diffusion of the messages.

Other Traditional Institutions

There are many other traditional institutions in the various communities that make up Nigeria, which discharge communicative functions that could lead to societal transformation. Institutions such as the different types of women association (i.e. *Umu-ada* in Igbo communities), men associations, and young people associations all function to transform society for the better. These associations can be relied upon and consciously made to step up communication functions and activities that would facilitate ideals of social peace and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the different ways through which indigenous media could be harnessed to facilitate the achievement of the goals of social security campaign in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper identified the crucial aspects of social insecurity in Nigeria that needed to be arrested. The position of the article is that a return to the most cherished African value system is what any meaningful social security campaign should be all about. Once that is done; the nation would

achieve social security and the international community would begin to see Nigeria in a good light. The paper extensively discussed the meaning, functions, characteristics and types of traditional communication systems available in Nigeria. It however contended that the institutional forms or media of traditional communication systems are best suited in the execution of a campaign for social change like the one under discussion. To this extent, the article identified certain traditional institutional media and examined how they would be used as communication channels to facilitate the campaign for social security in Nigeria. The traditional institutional media considered in the discussion are the traditional rulers, age groups, religious, and women institutions, amongst others. While we cannot play God by guaranteeing that these strategies suggested can spontaneously arrest social insecurity in Nigeria, we have the conviction based on academic confidence and practical experience that it will be worth the while giving them a chance.

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