The Ethics of Care for "Others": A Template for Addressing Security Problems in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Generally, insecurity in Nigeria is no longer news. This insecurity finds expression socially, politically, economically and physically. This paper, however, focuses on the threat to life and property that has become recurrent in recent times; especially earmarked by the recent cases of kidnapping, robbery, terrorism and genocide. Using the analytic and expository methods, findings show that an economic distributive injustice is a major factor contributing to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country today. The consciousness that everyone ought to fend for himself has left the vulnerable, the weak and the natural environment abandoned for decades. The result is what we are witnessing today– banditry, kidnapping for ransom, etc. However, the situation inadvertently reveals our interconnectedness in the society. The paper argues that the existential ethics of acknowledging and appreciating our interconnectedness with the 'other 'is a moral sensitivity that can engender care for others, and reduce security challenges in Nigeria.

Keywords: Others, insecurity, poverty, economic injustice, ego.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of insecurity in Nigeria has a chain of causes that are interconnected (Onoja, 2014). Research findings reveal that a major cause of insecurity is the level of poverty and ignorance. This poverty is occasioned by an economic distributive injustice that has driven a wide gulf between the rich and the poor, thus predisposing the poor into illegal and unlawful means of survival, which puts their lives and the lives of others at risk. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the actors involved in the problem of insecurity are not really there because they are poor; nonetheless, a greater number of those who constitute a threat to lives and property would not risk their lives and dignity if they have something to lose. Many would not consider taking arms to harm vulnerable citizens if they have an alternative means of meaningful survival.

As a response to this challenge, the paper begins by conceptualizing security and insecurity and the extent of the insecurity challenges in the country. It then proceeded to discuss the nexus between economic distributive injustice (resulting to an alarming rate of poverty) and insecurity in Nigeria. The paper recommends imbibing the existentialist culture of allowing the triumph of the interests of others over the self; as a moral sensitivity that will encourage choices and policies that will lead to fairness in the distribution of wealth.

THE NATURE OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Sometimes, in order to understand what a thing is, it is pertinent to consider its antithesis. Insecurity is the antithesis of security. It is in the deprivation of security that insecurity is conceived and birthed. Hence, a good way to expatiate on insecurity is to start by considering what security is. Security generally refers to

the absence of danger towards the acquisition of values- either politically, economically, or socially (Buzan, 1991). It is the absence of threats towards the basis of peace, unity and harmony in a nation. It is a state whereby individuals feel safe from threats or potential threats to their lives, property, and the ability to acquire values and pursue their rightful ends. Imobighe aptly conceptualizes security:

Security is the freedom from danger or threat to a nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interest…. And enhance the well-being of its people. Thus, security is the freedom from or the absence of those tendencies which could undermine internal cohesion and the corporate existence of a nation and its ability to maintain its vital institutions for the promotion of its core values… as well as freedom from danger to life and property (Oche, 2001: 76).

Thomas Hobbes posited that the foremost duty of the state is to secure the lives and property of her citizens. In same vein, Gaskin (1996) argues that since the government personifies the state, the government then is ladled with the responsibility of guaranteeing the security of its citizens and ensuring the preservation of the state from slipping into anarchy. McGrew (1988) argues that the security of a state is hinged on two cornerstones: the protection and maintenance of the socio-economic life of the nation in the face of external and internal danger; and the advancement of sustainable international order that reduces the risk to essential values, interests, and domestic order.

From this understanding of what security is, it is becomes easy to conceive what insecurity is. Insecurity is the state or condition that results from inadequate or inefficient measures put in place to ensure the safety of persons, property, information, and the pursuit of personal goals and values from malicious persons or groups, actions and influences (Aminu et al., 2015). Beland (2005) argues that insecurity involves the absence or lack of protection against crime, want of liberty from psychological harm, and lack of freedom from fear.

In Nigeria, the problem of insecurity has become endemic; often patronizing the headlines of our TV News, Newspapers, and social media. This is worrisome, especially when we consider the fact that Nigeria possesses the means and resources to ensure the security of her citizenry. However, due to some internal and external factors, Nigeria is still struggling with a basic issue such as security. Udoh (2015) identified some of the causes of the recent spate of insecurity in Nigeria as follows: the nature of our porous borders; the importation of arms illegally; the explosion of illicit arms groups; division along the lines of ethnic and religious extractions; ethno-religious fanaticism; emergence of different ethno-religious militia groups; corruption; marginalization; incompetent leadership; and unemployment and poverty. From these causal factors of insecurity in Nigeria, it is not surprising therefore that hunger, poverty, diseases, armed robbery, kidnapping, gangsterism, cultism, rape, hopelessness and despair, characterize Nigeria today. While the list of causes responsible for this ugly situation is long and all interlinked, this paper singles out economic distributive injustice as a major cause of the problem of insecurity in Nigeria, and attempts a plausible theoretical framework, that if adopted, would help to mitigate the problem.

Nigeria has been sliding down the precipice economically since the 1980s (Onoja, 2014). Though several governments have made efforts to flatten out this effect; Nigeria's economy has gone from bad to worse over the years. This has worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic that saw the meltdown of several businesses, the reduction of salaries, the laying off of several workers, increase in the prices of goods and services, and other effects which threaten life.

A few examples of recent cases would suffice to drive home this point. Just when we thought we were getting over the pains of the Chibok and Dapchi abduction cases; on 17th December, 2020, it was recorded that over 300 school boys were abducted from a school in Kankara community, Katsina, Nigeria; not far from where President Muhammadu Buhari visited for a vacation (Ojewale, 2021). This was coming after

Boko Haram fanatics had admitted to slaughtering over 100 rice farmers in Borno State, in revenge for their alleged cooperation with the Nigerian military. This particular attack took place at a rice farm in Garin Kwashebe. Surprisingly, it was on the day of the local government councilor elections. Statistics from SB Morgen Intelligence revealed that between January and December of 2020, there were about 150 cases of Boko Haram insurgency in the Northern region of Nigeria, at an average of about 13 cases per month; and 1,606 recorded killings. These figures blacklisted Nigeria as the third most terrorized nations in the world, according to the Global Terrorism Index that was revealed on 27th November, 2020 (Olurounbi, 2021).

We are just in the second quarter of 2021 and our ears are already heavy with the cries of deaths, killings, and kidnappings in the country. In April 2021, land disputes in Benue State led to the destruction of lives and properties in the Local Government of Konshisha. This time around, this despicable event was alleged to have been carried out by the military. The military has however denied any involvement in the killings. They rather voiced that they were among the victims of those who were killed as they recorded the deaths of 11 soldiers who lost their lives while trying to intervene in the situation (Ayitogo, 2021). This is besides the long-standing marauding, killings, destruction of farms, houses, and displacement that has been the lot of the Benue people for some years now, courtesy of the Fulani Herdsmen.

On 20th April, it was recorded that about several students and staff were abducted by armed bandits in what has been considered as an attack at Greenfield University, Kaduna State (Samanga, 2021). This happens to be the fourth recorded case of kidnapping from an educational institution in 2021, and the fifth case since December 2020. The last case of institutional abduction before this case was the Afaka kidnapping in which about 40 students were abducted (Reuters, 2021). It was alleged that the kidnappers demanded a ransom of 800 million naira. Parents and other well-meaning individuals contributed and reverted back with 15million naira. To the shock of Nigerians and other global sympathizers, on 23rd April 2021, the abductors returned the 15million naira and killed three students to express their grievance at the failure of the parties concerned to meet their demands (HassanWuyo, 2021). On 26th April, the kidnappers further killed two more students, and their bodies were found in Kwanan Bature, which is a village that is close to the university (HassanWuyo, 2021).

While Nigerians were still trying to recover from the shock of the abduction at Greenfield, another alarm resonated from The Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, bewailing the kidnapping of some of her students on 24th April, 2021 by unknown gunmen (Duru, 2021). To reveal the seriousness of this problem presently, data from SBM Intelligence shows from January to March of 2021, the number of recorded deaths from violent incidents, including attacks from militia herdsmen, Boko Haram, gang clashes, abductions, and bandits totals 2,861 (SBM Intel, 2021).

Chronicling all the instantiations of insecurity in terms of threat to lives and property in Nigeria is a near impossible task. Having given an inkling of the extent of this problem and the urgency to seek redress, the pertinent question is; what is fostering this menace? And how can we develop a moral sensitivity that will reduce the disposition towards this problem? In the next section, the paper shows in the link between economic distributive injustice and insecurity in Nigeria.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTIVE INJUSTICE AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Generally, justice refers to a set of universal principles or laws that govern the judgement of individuals in distinguishing right from wrong; especially in regards to giving to each person his due. Socio-politically, it is a broad term that covers a wide range of ideas dealing with "who gets what and why" (Bayu, 2019). Aristotle's discourse on the virtue of justice has been the kickoff for almost all Western accounts. For him, the principal feature of justice is treating like cases alike. Aristotle distinguishes between justice in the

distribution of wealth or other goods (distributive justice) and justice in reparation, as, for example, in punishing someone for a wrong he has done (retributive justice) (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). Some literatures have identified four types of justice viz. distributive, retributive, procedural, and restorative (Morton, 2011).

Notwithstanding, distributive justice, which is the focus here, deals with allocating to all members of a given society, a fair share of the benefits, privileges, goods, duties, opportunities, welfare, utility, resources and burdens present in that society. Economic distributive justice therefore connotes the fair allocation the wealth, jobs, income, and other economic resources in the society (Maies & Burgess, 2020). While there is common understanding for the need towards fair sharing in the society, the challenge often comes in determining the nature of the recipients of distribution (i.e. individual persons, reference classes, groups of persons etc.); and the basis or criteria upon which these economic benefits can be fairly distributed (Lamont & Christi, 2017).

Some probable principles for fair distribution are equality, equity, and need. The equality principle entails that everyone should get the same benefit, irrespective of their input; the equity principle requires that rewards should be allocated according to individual contribution (i.e. those who contribute more should get more while those who contribute less should get less); while the need principle demands that distribution should be on the basis of need (those with less should be given more while those with more should be given less) (Lamont & Christi, 2017). In line with these principles, John Rawls had earlier defined justice as fairness and advocated for distribution to favour everyone, especially the least disadvantaged in the society; Richard Dworkins advocated for equality in the distribution of resources; and Robert Norzick advocated for the entitlement theory (Allingham, 2021).For the purpose of this paper, we will not however bother ourselves with the philosophical nuances involved with the criteria for a preferred choice of distribution.

What then is economic distributive injustice? Judging from the earlier discourse on economic distributive justice, economic distributive injustice refers to the state where there is an unfair allocation of the economic benefits and resources in a society, fostered by an ideology, scheme, action, or other factors. That Nigeria is wallowing in the mire of economic distributive injustice becomes glaring when one compares the actual and potential resources and wealth that she possesses, and the bitter level of poverty that caresses the country. The common sense assumption is that since the country is rich and has the potential to become a super nation, the standard of living should be high and a good percentage of her populace should be above the poverty index. However, the shocking gulf between the few rich persons and the greater poor masses in the country, unmasks the vexatious state of economic distributive injustice endemic in the country. This has manifested itself in the form of abject poverty and unemployment.

The implication is that poverty, which is the resultant effect of this kind of injustice, now becomes a major fuel in the tragic drama of insecurity in Nigeria. In spite of the enormous human and mineral resources, the National Bureau Statistics as of 2020 reports that over 82 million Nigerians were living on less than $1 per day. These 82 million Nigerians represent a whopping 40% of the Nigerian populace who were living below the poverty line of #137,430 ($381.75) per year (Akintunde, 2020). This portrays a low level of wealth for a country that is claimed to possess Africa's largest economy; and the number one oil supplier in Africa, with a GDP of $448.12B as of 2019 (Macrotrends, 2021). The problem is all the more compounded by the rapid population growth which is outstripping the economic growth at 2%, purported to explode to 400 million by 2050. The situation is now worse off because Nigeria was still struggling to break out from the downturn of the 2016 economic recession when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, plunging her into a deeper economic recession (Akintunde, 2020).

A different data records over 90 million Nigerians living in abject poverty on less than $1.9 per day. While using the living standard of $5.50 per day, another report records that the poverty rate of Nigerians as of 2021 is about 92% (Macrotrends, 2021); with 25% (about 53 million) vulnerable; and 23.1% unemployed

(World Bank, 2020). This is terribly shocking when one considers that despite all the wealth in the country, only about 8% of Nigerians reach this benchmark. World Bank even projects the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic to push more 5 million people in into this category by June of 2021 (Temilade, 2020). World Data Lab even projects that if nothing is done about the current situation, over 178 million Nigerians will be living in abject poverty by 2030 (Baier, 2021). This is a seriously unjust gulf between the rich and the poor. Indeed the wealth of the country is enough for everybody's need but not for everybody's greed.

How does this play out in fostering insecurity? To get an idea of how poverty engineers insecurity, a pertinent question to ask is this- what becomes of those Nigerians who are willing to work and earn a decent living but cannot find jobs or the resources to create wealth for themselves? What happens to those Nigerians who even have jobs and are working their lives out but their remuneration is not commensurate to their efforts, and hence, unable to sustain a reasonable standard of living? Aminu et al. (2015) gives a succinct answer:

The poor development status of Nigeria no doubt breeds atmosphere of frustrated expectations and foster widespread indignation on the part of those that are trapped in the vortex circle of abject poverty. The condition of hopelessness is further aggravated by impotent poverty eradication programmes and conspiratorial neglect by the Nigerian state. In the face of this predicament, individuals and groups respond differently depending on situational factor and capacity. These responses are crystallized and find expression in various shades of antisocial behaviours including armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgency among others (p. 33).

What this implies is that those victims of poverty who cannot withstand the pressures of the hard life they have been subjected to, and still keep a moral front in obedience to social and civil norms/laws, become preys to their evil disposition by constituting a nuisance to the society. They take laws into their hands and take out their frustration on the vulnerable around them. In most cases, they see their deprivation in the wealth of others and so go about getting back their "rights" by any means possible, even at the cost of lives.

Also, the advantaged of the society sometimes take advantage of the situation to weaponize poverty by exploiting the vulnerability, gullibility and desperation of the poor masses to recruit them into gangs in order to do their dirty jobs. After all, since the poor are desperate for money and these few rich persons have the money, all they need to do is the show them the silver lining with a tip of the money that "should be rightfully theirs, all things being equal," and their loyalty will be bought.

Despite the obvious undesirable effects that this trend has caused, what we see is the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. What is more disturbing is that this growing divide between the rich and the poor is being orchestrated on purpose by a great number of those who are at the hem of affairs in the nation. They continue to initiate policies and structures that favour them at the expense of the masses because they do not want to lose their priced standing of being "worshipped" as gods among men (Adeoye, 2020). They do not want to lose control over the masses who they are sure would stop doing their evil biddings once they have meaningful alternative means of survival. They want to continue being able to buy the consciences and seal the mouths of the gullible populace from speaking and fighting for the truth with a few naira. They want to continue monopolizing the means of wealth production so that they can maximize profits at ridiculous rates without competition. The list is just endless (Ochonu, 2016).

However, underlying this attitude of the rich in getting richer and making the poor poorer is the exaltation of the ego (self) over the common good. This attitude springs from the idea that the world is a jungle and there is no relation; hence, every individual should fight for his personal interest in a contest where only the fittest survive. As such, individuals should pursue their ends at all costs, even if it means using others to achieve one's end. This kind of sensitivity makes the privileged wealthy to treat the poor masses as less of persons and inferior beings whose lives are worthless, save to foster their own selfish ends. However, they fail to

realize that we are all interconnected as a single system and since these "worthless others,"(in the eyes of some of the rich) represent the sick part of that same system that they also belong; they will also experience the discomfort as members of that single system. This is clearly the case because inasmuch as the poor and the middle class are more prone to these insecurity challenges due to their vulnerability, the rich are not also spared. Several cases abound whereby the perpetrators of this economic injustice also had a taste of their own bad soup, as victims of kidnappings, robbery, killings etc.

This mindset of individualism that exalts the ego therefore will not lead to the progress of the nation and the negative consequences will ricochet back to everyone. We will now consider how the existentialist's proposal of seeing "others" as an integral part of a system that we are all connected to, will indispose us to living only for the self and open us up to embracing and considering the welfare of others in our judgement.

THE CONSIDERATION FOR "OTHERS": A MORAL SENSITIVITY TOWARDS ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Existentialism as a school of thought emphasizes human individuality, subjectivity, freedom, authenticity, and many other related themes. A superficial reading of this route of thinking in existentialist thought may make one readily conclude that they exalt the ego or self over others and barely pay attention to other individuals. However, existentialists were conscious of this tendency to misread them. Existentialists also realize that the individual defines his existence in a world that is shared by "other" beings like him. Realizing this conundrum, the concept of "Others" becomes a recurring decimal in the writings of existentialists, to address the concerns regarding the individual leading an authentic life in a communal world where others like him also exist. Thus, in order to even out this tendency, they took turns in developing an ethical framework to draw our consciousness to, and guide and relationship with others.

According to Heidegger, Others are those that are indistinguishable from us. In His words:

By "Others" we do not mean everyone else but- those over against whom the "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too… By reason of this with-like Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others (in Pydi, 2018).

This implies that others exist in same world that we live in; are involved in same projects; and use the same equipment as us. Heidegger further encourages us to imbibe the idea of leaping-ahead (*Vorausspringen*), which involves supporting, assisting and giving recommendations to others in order to aid them to be transparent and free. For Heidegger, this attitude towards Others, instantiates the ideas of consideration (*Ruecksicht*) and forbearance/tolerance towards those around us (*Nachsicht*) (George, 1996). Heidegger's idea of reconciling individuality and authenticity while appreciating the existence and concerns of Others is through what he calls "empathy (*Einfühlung*)."

Heidegger argues that man is not primarily a private subject; his existence in the world cannot and should not be severed from other beings like himself. However, because he is prone to disguise, reticence, and self-concealment, there is a greater need to cultivate special skills and ways for relating healthily with others through empathy. This empathy enables us to put ourselves in the position of others, in order to understand their pains and woes. Since empathy presupposes our interconnectedness with others, the exercise of this disposition would aid in flattening out the tendency of being indifferent towards the needs of others around us.

It is obvious that the problem with economic injustice boils down to the fact that the "haves" rarely put themselves in the shoes of the "have-nots" in order to understand their suffering. The rich rest content in

their castles of gold; and now, the poor who toil to make wealth for the rich, in frustration, plot to break into these castles and plunder it so they can reclaim the just rewards of their labour, even if it means breaking the law. Now imagine a Nigeria where everyone is empathetic to the needs of others as opined by Heidegger; surely we will have fewer cases of stolen monies getting rotten in secret safe houses while people are dying everyday on the streets, or trying to survive by preying on others.

Jean-Paul Sartre corroborates this idea of Heidegger when he noted that consciousness is not by itself or alone in the world. It must accommodate and accustom itself to other minds, which are also fighting for survival. Commenting on Sartre's thoughts, Detmer (2009) notes that:

For Sartre, this is a fundamental point in that the Other becomes a mediator between me and myself; without the Other I cannot escape my own subjective experience and perspective. Hence, for Sartre the Other's look allows me to achieve a sense of objectivity regarding myself. Sartre contests that the self can only be conceived via the existence of others; prior to the existence of others the concept of the self is meaningless. Through being aware of the Other we in turn become aware of our self (p. 58).

Sartre states that the essence of my being-for-itself, "must refer to a primary relation between my consciousness and that of the Other" (Sartre, 1992: 341). Solipsism for Sartre is therefore façade since man lives not only for himself but also for others. Sartre cautions against the tendency of self-objectification by through the attempt to transcend the existence of others by denying their freedom. He calls this sadism (Meakin, 2019). As an antidote, Sartre discusses and recommends the idea of love for others in terms of mutuality and oneness (Stevens 2008). Sartre calls us to recognize the place of other people in our moral life since ethics is based on how we ought to live with other people. This is all the more important as others constitute an integral dimension of our personality and existence. As noted it by Warnock (1967), "it would be generally agreed that the desires and wishes of others, their interests and their liberty, constitute a limit to the morally desirable exercise of our own freedom to satisfy our desires" (p. 38). Sartre goes on to say that in order to act in good faith and avoid bad faith, our choices and actions must necessarily engender freedom for ourselves and for others: "the further corollary of it is that in choosing freedom for oneself, it must be chosen for others. Thus, unless man takes refuge in Bad Faith, man must admit that he is committed to the freedom of others" (Warnock, 1967: 40-41).

Here again, we see that if Sartre was to address the problem of economic injustice and its resultant effect of insecurity in Nigeria, he would relate it to the extreme egoism and selfishness of a few privileged Nigerians in places of power and authority who misappropriate public funds for their selfish interests at the expense of the masses. If these persons were to see their existence as inexorably interconnected with others, then there will be the greater likelihood of treating them with fairness and making policies that will allow the masses the freedom and necessary resources to pursue their economic aspirations.

The existential philosophy surrounding the need for the appreciation and concern for others in the scheme of things reaches its peak with Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas goes as far as arguing the basis of human life is the responsibility towards others, and only in others does an individual realize self-discovery (Dü?gün, 2017).

This is clearly evinced in Levinas' (1979) own words:

The face (of the other) is a living presence; it is expression… the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. The face is present in its refusal to be contained. The face resists possession, resists my power… the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation… The face is a source from which all meaning appears. The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation. The Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me. The face is what forbids us to kill (p. 297).

Levinas even goes so far as to state that the value of the other must exceed the value of the self. "In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill…" (Kearney & Levinas, 1984: 60). He further notes: "My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness" (Kearney &Levinas, 1984: 60). He argues that since we exist in a world with others, choices relating to our ethical responsibility to others to precede all others, including those of our own affairs: "Responsibility for another… precedes essence in a subject… The word I means… answering for everything and for everyone" (Levinas, 1998: 114). As such, our love for others has its roots in the fact that the self cannot exist or find meaning in itself without others. Being a devout Jew, Levinas quotes a platitude common among the Jews to buttress his point: "the other's material needs are my spiritual needs." Ethics in the light of Levinas is therefore, against nature because "it forbids the murderousness of my natural will to put my own existence first" (Levinas, 1998: 120

Here, we have an understanding concerning others that puts their interests before self-interest. This is the ultimate triumph of otherness over selfness. The problem with Nigeria is the triumph of selfness over otherness. Nigeria would be a better place if the government and the well-to-do in the society groom this consciousness of putting the interests of others before those of self. In a country where the wealth of a single person could pay the minimum wage of Nigerians in a month, there would be an explosion of growth, development and reduction in the tendency of frustrated youths going illegal to survive if we all develop the moral sensitivity to consider the needs and interests of others.

CONCLUSION

One viable way of addressing socio-political issues is by reforming the mind. Physical structures may be reformed but if the mind still bears the disease, it will be hard to see the desired change. However, once the mind is properly reformed, it becomes easier to initiate and consolidate the desired changes in the society. As seen from the body of the paper, there is a strong link between economic distributive injustice, poverty, and insecurity in Nigeria. But the cause for this sad state of the economic disparity between the rich and poor in the country owes much to greed and selfishness. The paper thus advocates that if the moral sensibility of going beyond our selfish interests to consider the plight and needs of others, as espoused in existential ethics is assimilated; there will be a reawakening of the consciousness for fairness in the allocation of economic resources in the nation. This will have the positive effect of reducing the deplorable state of poverty in the nation, and consequently cushion the disposition of frustrated and pressured Nigerians becoming threats to lives and properties.
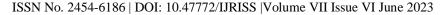
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