

Female Forbearance, Covid-19 Challenges and Strange Insecurity in South East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Women have tended to exhibit more physical restraints than men. But whenever it matters most, the erstwhile restrained woman has also proved to be made of flesh, blood and iron determination. This usually happens at the bounds of her patience. Covid-19 represented peculiarly problematic conditions in families. When respites came and the Covid-19 peril retreated, the narratives changed again to the precincts of the typical vulnerability of women in the Nigerian state. The nation returned to the tales of insecurity. In the strange dimension of the national insecurity in Southeast Nigeria, women commuters of all age brackets and health conditions were expected to disembark at security checkpoints on the nation's highways to raise their arms in surrender, to pass through security checks on daily bases. This paper explores the theme of such humiliating scenarios smacking of society operating on the threshold of female forbearance. The general objective of the work therefore is to study the scenario of society operating at the threshold of female forbearance. The paper is fundamentally a prognosis. The methodology of the contribution is qualitative. The theoretical framework is the frustration-aggression theory.

KEYWORDS: *Female forbearance, Covid-19 challenges, Insecurity in South East Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

Women have tended to exhibit more physical restraints than men (Archer, 2009; Adams, 1983; Baillargeon et al 2007). The applicability of this position possibly extends to all cultures and generations. However, this tendency does not actually imply deforming weaknesses on the part of women. It is seemingly an integral part of the female personality. Therefore, whenever it matters most, the formerly restrained woman may prove to be made of iron determination. Hence, both in historic and modern times, the previously undemonstrative woman has subsequently unveiled a capacity for effective action and possible aggression (Burbank, 1994). But this usually happens at the threshold of her forbearance. The transition from equanimity to revolt in women is usually precipitated by insufferable situations, when the contributions of men appear apparently inadequate, acutely ineffectual or worthless and certainly frustrating. Such transitions are likely to emanate from frustration. Covid-19 represented peculiarly problematic conditions in families and the generic society. Many women at the time stepped in, took the risks and shielded their families from oncoming danger (UN Women, 2020).

Then when respites came and the Covid-19 peril retreated, the narratives changed again to the precincts of the typical vulnerability of women in the Nigerian state (Lord-Mallam et al, 2020). Organization of Islamic Cooperation (2021, p.4) highlights that:

Throughout the ages, women have contributed effectively and actively to all social, political, cultural and economic fields and also participated in the building of civilizations and training of generations. Despite those important contributions however, women and girls today suffer exclusion, marginalization and face difficulties impeding their participation in social domain and other areas.

The Nigerian nation returned to the tales of insecurity and masculine complicities, and insensitivities. In more complex dimensions, women continued to “face difficulties impeding their participation in social domain and other areas” (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2021). In the strange dimension to the national insecurity in Southeast Nigeria, women commuters of all age brackets and health conditions were expected to disembark at security checkpoints on the nation’s highways to raise their arms in surrender, to pass through security checks on daily bases. This paper explores the theme of such humiliating scenarios. The general objective of the paper therefore is to study the incidence of society operating at the threshold of female forbearance. The work is accordingly fundamentally a prognosis. The methodology of the paper is qualitative. The theoretical framework is the frustration-aggression theory.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The worldwide Covid-19 development later became benign in Nigeria. But the enduring insecurity situation in the country persisted. In other words, the receding Covid-19 crises were followed closely by heightened insecurity situation. Under each scenario women have arguably carried an unfair share of the associated burdens and the occasioned indecencies. In the Southeast location of the nation, the insecurity problem soon began to lead to violent clashes between insurgents and security personnel. Even the nation’s highways were not spared as war theaters for the insurgents-security personnel exchanges. Invariably, the commuters on the various roads in the Southeast including harmless male and female passengers became victims of the indignities that the security

personnel unleashed on the road users. Njoku (2021) reports that “it was a horrible and dehumanizing experience for road users on the dilapidated Enugu-Onitsha Expressway following their subjection to a stop-and-search operation by soldiers mounting a checkpoint between Enugu and Anambra states”.

According to Njoku (2021) “the inhuman treatment they obtained was akin to the treatment meted to captives from a war-ravaged territory. To cross the Amansea-Awka boundary, passengers were dropped off a few metres away and forced to raise both hands in surrender and walk about two kilometres to resume their journey. Also, no vehicle was authorized to proceed with more than the driver, who was thoroughly searched by soldiers. The development followed what has been described as a “stop-and-search” operation adopted by the soldiers since a military checkpoint was attacked at Ihiala in Anambra State, which resulted in the killing of a soldier and stealing of his rifle”. Njoku (2021) narrates that one of the female commuters described it as “horrible and painful experience.” Uneze (2021) submits that from the adjoining Imo State “the people are worried over the maltreatment, harassment and unnecessary punishment to which soldiers have been subjecting the people in the state capital. Several commuters and pedestrians are also feeling the heat as they are being asked to raise their hands up, frog-jump and other inhuman treatments”.

Figure I: Some Commuters Including Female Citizens at a Military Check Point on the Amansea-Awka Boundary, Enugu-Onitsha Road



Source: Njoku (2021)

Figure II: Passengers (Mainly Female Passengers) raise their

Hands to cross a checkpoint at Owerri-Orlu Road Imo State



Source: <https://www.nairaland.com/6577011/imo-passing-checking-points-owerri>

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is framed on the frustration-aggression theory. The origin of the theory is actually traceable to Dollard et al (1939). It was subsequently, further developed by Miller et al (1941) and Berkowitz (1969). The theory holds that aggression arises from frustrating a person's efforts to attain an objective (Friedman & Schustack, 1999). Dollard at al. (1939, p.1) originally proposed that “the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression”. Breuer & Elson (2017, p.1) amplify that “what is especially noteworthy in this definition is that, unlike the use of the word in everyday language, frustration here is not understood as an emotional experience but as an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response”. Differently denoted, “frustration is defined as an event instead of an affective state. The arguable benefit of characterizing frustration through observable qualities of events or environmental characteristics is that it allows description and testing of its causal effects, such as that on aggression, objectively, instead of relying on subjective self-reported introspection (Breuer & Elson, 2017, p.2).

These authors further argue that “looking at the original definition by Dollard and colleagues, one might criticize their claim to universal validity”. Taken verbatim, “the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration” suggests that aggression does not occur without any form of prior frustration, and the assertion that frustration “always leads to some form of aggression” implies that aggression is a certain outcome of any frustration. These deterministic assumptions were somewhat qualified in a 1941 publication by the same

authors when they stated that “frustration produces instigation to aggression but this is not the only type of instigation that it may produce” (Breuer & Elson, 2017, p.2). But whatever be the case, in the application of the frustration-aggression hypothesis to this work, it is held that frustration can produce instigation to aggression. Hence all scenarios that are frustration-tainted are to be eluded.

REVISITING THE INCIDENCE OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

Covid-19 entailed universal devastations. What started from Wuhan, Central China soon found its deadly way to all the corners of the world. In Nigeria, “the first confirmed case of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, of a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen” (Maclean & Dahir, 2020; Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020, PM News, 2020). From these two “index-cases” the Covid-19 wave was profoundly felt in every corner of Nigeria, not necessarily in terms of the number of infected persons but based more on the consequences of the occasioned lockdowns and other ostensibly precautionary measures.

It became commonplace for Nigerian leaders at the federal and state levels to issue orders for everywhere to be locked down. Schools, markets, motor parks, banks, public and private business and leisure locations became locked down. All classes of hotels closed shops. Workers in the public and private sectors received orders from their employers to be off duty. The only citizens that had permission to move about were the ones engaged in food and medical businesses. There were many Nigerian women in this segment of the society. Specifically in South East Nigeria, such women are strategically locatable in the food production and supply chain. They operate as subsistence farmers at the countryside. They engage in peasant farming under which their products still get to the urban centers for sustenance of the city dwellers. Still under this scenario it is either the women from the rural locations are on a daily bases taking their farm produce to profitable market places at the city centers or their counterparts as traders from the towns are migrating to the rural areas to make the purchases at source from the farmers.

Then on either side of this food production and distribution chain it is either the women are carrying one heavy load or the other on their heads or they are loaded together in rickety vehicles with their food items and wares. At the various traditional markets in the cities or the countryside, the women-buyers are always chasing moving vehicles up and down so that they could be the first to get hold of whatever the sellers are bringing to the market. From dawn to dusk and even at night these women are in this business mainly in open spaces under intense rain and scorching sun. Under the cultural setting of Southeast Nigeria these same women are expected to play the principal role in getting food ready for the family at home either in the morning or evening hours. Covid-19 accordingly implied double whammy for the women.

Under this Nigerian cultural setting applicable to the Southeastern part of the country, the nurses who were expected to play unavoidable roles in healthcare delivery at the Covid-19 period were / are predominantly women. Many of the doctors were also women. These women in healthcare delivery and their counterparts in the food production and supply chain were out on the road at very critical moments when Nigeria was locked down as a result of Covid-19. Many men were at home at this time, from the elite to the subaltern class in the society. The overbearing political class dominated by men was at home. The deadly terrorists and dare devil bandits (usually men) were all at home too while the women were under the sun.

NIGERIA'S INSECURITY CHALLENGE

Insecurity has seemingly become second nature to Nigeria. It is currently among the defining features of the Nigerian topography. But it is actually difficult to conceptualize insecurity, particularly societal insecurity. However, insecurity in this paper stands for “the state of being open to danger or threat; lack of protection”. Insecurity accordingly prevails in a country when nearly every citizen in the nation is in a state of being open to danger and lacks protection from the security agencies of the state. Insecurity as currently characterized is a comparatively new phenomenon in Nigeria. The nation has not always been this insecure. Pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria did not actually harbour many violent criminals. It is therefore quite plausible to trace the proper origins of violent crime in the country to the first military coup in January 1966, the twin issues of a military rule which lasted intermittently till 1999 and the embedded civil war, 1967-1970 (Ewetan & Ese, 2014). The coming of the army and the killings their participation in deadly politics produced made the barrel of the gun an artifact of the Nigerian general culture. In the coups and counter coups the army killed. At the end of the civil war also the weapons that found their ways into the hands of unauthorized and ill-trained people were never fully retrieved.

In no distant time, illicitly held firearms were being put to illegal use. Armed robbery operations started, and illegitimate businesses also began to grow in the areas of importation and distribution of illegal weapons. The next notable epoch in this historical account of insecurity in the country came with restiveness in the Niger Delta which soon birthed a kidnapping dimension (Ngwama, 2014). Hostage taking or kidnapping soon became widespread in the country (Emanemua & Akinlosotu). Then the Boko Haram emerged and subsequently metamorphosed into one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world (Ewi, 2016). Currently, the taxonomy of the country's insecurity trajectories features nomenclatures such as criminality, banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, Fulani herdsmen (Fulani herdsmenism) and unknown gunmen attacks. In all these descriptions Nigerian lives and properties are wasted by fellow human beings. Human lives have lost value in the hands of such criminal elements in the era of worsening insecurity crises in the country

THE SOUTHEAST DIMENSION TO NIGERIA'S GENERIC INSECURITY

From its origins in Nigeria's Niger Delta region in 2006, the next location of kidnapping's reign was in Southeast Nigeria, precisely in Abia State (Ngwama, 2014). The new dimension in criminality combined with an already bad situation of armed robbery in the region to render life unbearable for the people (da Costa, 2009). These untoward developments became added to the existing tensions in the region created by the activities of neobiafran agitators. The Southeastern section of Nigeria was the base of the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) fought between the Nigerian federal side and the breakaway former Eastern Region of the country (part of the former Eastern Region is now officially in the South-South). The Biafran side was defeated in the war – at the war front - but a new generation of Southeasterners has since emerged. This new generation vehemently questions the nature of the treatment meted to their progenitors which led to the war in the first instance, and expresses unceasing interest in the rebirth of the failed Biafran republic. The currently most notable among the groups of neobiafrans is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). It was previously the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) that led in the agitations.

The government of Nigeria has since proscribed IPOB and formally branded it a terrorist organization in controversy. For instance, “the United States government said that it does not see the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, as a terrorist organisation and although the US is strongly in support of a peaceful resolution of internal crisis in Nigeria, under the United States’ laws, IPOB does not fit in as a terrorist organisation (Ogbonna, 2017). The group on its part has remained unrelenting in agitating for the restoration of the status of Biafra as a country. This has led to several bloody altercations between security agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria and IPOB. Both in the days of MASSOB and the current reign of IPOB, the organizations would declare a day of “sit-at-home” on which Igbos (the dominant ethnic group in the defunct Biafra) were expected to observe a public holiday, in marking one event or the other, particularly to commemorate the 30th of May 1967. It was on this date that the Republic of Biafra was declared by Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, then the Military Governor of Eastern Region of Nigeria. On such “sit-at-home” days the economy of the Southeast becomes ground to a halt. Such occasions usually lead to further clashes between Nigeria’s security forces and the pro-Biafran agitators, heightening the tensions in the land and coming under the arguable categorization of insecurity.

Nigerian state authorities label the agitating Biafrans terrorists but they identify themselves as freedom fighters. Where government sees them as people attempting to dismember Nigeria, they see themselves as people seeking independence status for their own territory. Then among the variety of possible reasons for the rising violence in the area, Ishiekwene (2021) touches on “the ascendancy of illegitimate politicians installed by hook and crook, the stone-deafness of Buhari’s administration and his politics of spite and the irresponsible conduct of leaders from the region, who have mismanaged the resourcefulness and energy of the teeming youths”. The characters at the center of the thesis of Ishiekwene (2021) are invariably men. Therefore, in the gender contexts of this paper, the Biafran agitators and the actors on the side of government whose combative contacts usually heat up the polity of the Southeast are all conjointly of the male gender.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF FEMALE FORBEARANCE

Presently in several locations of the Southeast Nigeria, able-bodied but out of work young men are all in hiding, leaving only their mothers and wives and other female relatives to move about freely and fend for these men. This followed “random killings and systematic attacks on police stations, security personnel and state institutions, including courts and electoral commission offices” in the region (Ishiekwene, 2021). State authorities attribute these acts of lawlessness to IPOB and their militant wing named the Eastern Security Network (ESN). The organization(s) continue(s) to deny such allegations. So enters the nomenclature of Unknown Gunmen (UGM) into the insecurity lexicon of Southeast Nigeria and the remainder of the country. Security forces are accused of fishing out ill-groomed young men and exterminating them in retaliation for the killing of their own men by the UGM or IPOB/ESN. The unknown gunmen phenomenon has accordingly added a strange dimension to the freedom-fighter claims of the Indigenous People of Biafra. How would the occasioned level of destruction lead to their dream independence status?

At the height of this disorder, the IPOB declared another “sit-at-home” on the 30th of May 2021, a day that was predicted to portend Armageddon (the biblical prediction of the ultimate battle between evil and good and the day the battle would be fought). As the security agencies prepared for the D-day and thereafter, and in taking containment measures against their usual

attackers at checkpoints in the Southeast, all road users except the drivers of the vehicles would disembark, with hands fully raised up to cross the checkpoints. Harmless women were not spared, even the pregnant ones and the aged. Society was pushing women to the limits of their forbearance. As the women's miserable and humiliating experiences follow the retreating Covid-19 trauma, they are becoming frustrated in their daily routines.

Southeast Nigeria had in the past witnessed where women decided that enough was enough. This paper refers to the eruption commonly called "the Aba Women's riots of 1929" which some contemporary researchers prefer to designate as "Aba Women's rebellion". The revolt was "touched off by the imposition of direct taxation and the introduction of new local courts and especially of warrant chiefs" in the region (American Historical Association, 2021). The rebellion was in other words touched off by draconian colonial attitudes which these women continued to live with until they reached the limits of their endurance. Frustrations then led to aggression. Political gladiators who pretend that all is well in Nigeria (Southeast Nigeria) while their areas of jurisdiction go up in flames need to stop taking women for granted. Different bands of bandits who unleash mayhem on the land must not conclude that women of Southeast Nigeria and indeed women everywhere may not rebel against the miseries they endure as fallouts of such bedlams. The fact remains that the champions and fighters in all these altercations and confusion are usually, predominantly men. It begins to seem as if women need peace in their lives more than men and are becoming increasingly frustrated by men's aggressions.

Indeed, to mobilize women again in the regards of the Aba market women rebellion will not be impracticable as there are in existence already the nucleuses of such formations and standing preliminary pronouncements that the women are disturbed by the current state of affairs (Obiora, 2021; Premium Times, 2021). Speaking through Obiora (2021) one of the female groups declares:

We express our dismay and disgust over the alarming state of insecurity and threat to lives and properties in the South East of Nigeria, ironically, the safest geo-political zone in Nigeria until a couple of months ago. We condemn in strong and specific terms, the ongoing killings in Igboland, whether by the military operatives or unknown gunmen. There is no gainsaying the fact that the magnitude of carnage in the South East today is both outrageous and desecrating. We appeal to the authorities concerned to rise up to their responsibilities and arrest this ugly situation before it gets out of hand.

The women in Obiora (2021) still highlight that "during crisis women and their children suffer more, as mothers in the society, we are naturally closer to the family, as a result, more sensitive to the emotions, pain and pleasure associated with the events which affect humanity, and no reasonable or caring mother can remain impassive when her child or children are slaughtered for unjustified reasons". These assertions are considered ominous pointers in this paper's prognoses as they are products of frustration.

CONCLUSION

The paper has interrogated a gender dimension to the Southeastern trajectory of the generic insecurity in Nigeria, against the backdrop of the receded Covid-19 pandemic. Deploying the theoretical framework of frustration-aggression thesis, the work has demonstrated that Nigerian women as represented by their Southeastern members are being increasingly frustrated by the insecurity conundrum in the location. Meanwhile the male participants in the subsisting state of

affairs behave as if they are into business as usual. Drawing inferences from the Aba Market Women rebellion of 1929, the contribution prognosticates that women may not continue to be taken for granted *ad infinitum* in the face of male complicities in perpetuating these insecurities. The paper concludes that when a society that operates at the threshold of female forbearance unravels, the consequences would usually be devastating. So let this frustration in Southeast Nigeria not instigate aggression. Avoiding such possibilities then entails increasing male restraints in their fuelling tendencies.

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