



The unintended legacy of Niger-Delta amnesty on contemporary peacebuilding discourse in Nigeria: An introspection

Abdul-Wasi Babatunde Moshood

Political Science Department, Lagos State University, Nigeria.

Author's Email: abdul.moshood@lasu.edu.ng

Abstract

The strategy of using amnesty as a mechanism for resolving conflict in war-torn societies and in societies where conflict seems intractable has become essential where peace is desired at all costs. As one of the tools of transitional justice system, amnesty has proved very useful in countries like Nigeria, Cambodia, Chile, Brazil, and South Africa to birth enduring peace in the countries. In recent times, however, there are views that hold that amnesty is creating a contagious effect, a process which may foster culture of violence in a country. Using exploratory research design, an empirical method including interview among critical stakeholders. It adopts qualitative method including analysis of both primary and secondary data. This study examines amnesty in Nigeria and the argument that it might have encourage the spread of culture of violence in the country. The study seeks a relationship between the current waves of violence in the country and its possible connection to amnesty programme used as part of conflict management strategy in the country. The study will benefit from doctoral research that investigates the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria and continuous discourse of the post amnesty phase.

Keywords: Amnesty, conflict, peace, culture of violence, transitional justice

1. Introduction

Amnesty is a process initiated to grant pardon to one or more warring parties for peace to take place and it is often initiated by external parties and most often the United Nations (UN). In the context of Nigeria, the amnesty programme is conceived as a home-grown peace-building initiative undertaken by the Nigerian government to achieve immediate cessation to conflict to enable a post-conflict peace-building effort to take place in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Moshood, 2016). As argued elsewhere, while the process of amnesty in Nigeria was to achieve immediate cessation to allowed for a post conflict peacebuilding, amnesty programme in South Africa was to achieve a healing process in a post-apartheid South Africa, The Extra Ordinary Chamber of the Court of Cambodia (ECCC) emerged as a domestic system of adjudication, coming in the aftermath of

the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. This brought a slight twist to the process of amnesty where the leadership of this movement (Khmer Rouge) were brought before the chamber to account for the crime committed during the period spanning 1975-1979 after amnesty was initially granted (Moshood 2023). Despite variation in the mode and operation of amnesty, the commitment of the programme is often very similar which always aimed at advancing peace through immediate cessation of hostility in a country. In a study conducted by this author in 2016, it was discovered that contrary to previous amnesty programmes in other parts of the world which were managed by the UN and other transnational organisations, the amnesty programme in Nigeria is home-grown, it is locally managed, financed and implemented. Also, amnesty is assuming a cliché where a conflict-ridden society often believe one of the ways governments could



negotiate with them is through the offer of amnesty. The recent clamour for amnesty for Boko Haram terrorist group and bandits in Zamfara and other parts of the country are cases in view.

Several studies on amnesty perceive the usage of amnesty in different forms. For example, scholars in international legal jurisprudence have argued that amnesty is a total negation of the international justice system (Thale and Beltran 2013; Naqvi 2003) for them, granting amnesty to criminals is like a perversion of justice. Some scholars have also argued that amnesty in the context of the of the Niger Delta is a gilded strategy. That is, amnesty was an attempt by the state to have an unhindered access to oil in the Niger Delta region, and not an effort that was aimed sincerely at resolving the conflict in the Niger Delta region (Obi 2014; Agbiboa 2014). Also, in recent times there have been views which hold that amnesty has the potential of spreading and encouraging a culture of violence in any country. This partly explains why some people take to violence to press home their demand (Abayomi 2021; Murdock 2013). The Nigerian case is a useful example where some youth engage in banditry and criminality with the belief that at the end of the day, they will be granted state pardon. The calls by some group of people that amnesty should be granted to Boko Haram terrorists and bandits further give credence to the contagious effect of amnesty in Nigeria. This did not go well with some Nigerians who feel this will amount to a privilege stressing too far. While the government in some quarters have argued that amnesty granted to Boko Haram terrorist group is to accommodate those who were wrongly lured or forced into the group (Bakindo 2013). The amnesty they also argue will also accommodate repentant Boko Haram who through war weariness have decided to lay down their arms and ready to receive amnesty. The reason why this is mostly advocated is that

the government feels peace is what matters most now rather than laying emphasis on prosecuting criminals (Bakindo 2013). This last group, Abayomi (2021) found worrisome, and belief will create a contagion, where criminality will be encouraged, entrenched and ingrained in the mind of unsuspected Nigerians. The fact that there is no repercussion for crimes committed will unwittingly lure and encourage youngster into criminality. To some Nigerians and even the Shekau group of Boko Haram who rejected amnesty, they believe that the government lacks the structure to prosecute offender. Accordingly, lack of capacity and complicity of the state give more meaning to why amnesty is seen as an option for Boko Haram rather than the disguise clamour of achieving peace (Bakindo 2013).

Despite claims and counter claims on the utility of amnesty in the peacebuilding discourse, there have not been any serious attempt to evaluate if actually amnesty as a conflict management tool has the tendency to spread or encourage culture of violence in a country. This is the vacuum this study wants to fill. The motivation and justification for this study includes: (a) to cross-examine the usefulness of amnesty in the contemporary peacebuilding discuss. (b)To interrogate the claim that government granting of amnesty to militants, bandits and terrorist alike is an indication of its lack of capacity, (c) and to inquire if amnesty programme in Nigeria has encouraged violent culture in any way. This study through in-depth interview interrogates the phenomenon of culture of violence in Nigeria and examines ways and means amnesty might have contributed to militarising the polity. It interrogates the continuous relevant of amnesty in resolving conflict generally focusing on Nigeria. The study is divided into six segments, section one is the general introduction followed by discussion of methodology of the research. Section three



deals with conceptual clarification and literature review on amnesty. The fourth segment offers an analysis of amnesty in Nigeria. Section five interrogates and analyse amnesty and violent culture in Nigeria, the last segment concludes with some recommendations.

2. Methodology

The research design for this study is exploratory. Both primary and secondary data collection were adopted for the study. Qualitative content analysis was employed to systematically analyse textual data from speeches, scholarly literature, books, government reports, policy papers, official statements from relevant stakeholders, and journal articles. Relevant videos were also reviewed in order to gain more insight into the study. The study gained essentially from the critical stake holders' interview during the doctoral study in 2015. It however expanded the interview by interviewing scholars at the Uthman Dan Fodio University who have had direct interface with the Boko Haram terrorist group and the bandits. It also conducted interview with journalist who have covered Boko Haram and the Bandits in the Northeast and Northwest. Military personnel were also interviewed. In all, 15 people were interviewed including 5 university scholars, 5 journalists and 5 military personnel. The interviews were conducted in February, 2024. The paper was analysed around themes.

Understanding amnesty as a transitional justice¹ tool

Amnesty as a concept is derived from the Greek word *amnestia*, meaning to cast into oblivion or forgetfulness. This is shared with the medical term amnesia which means a loss of memory (Chigara 2002). Amnesty is defined as a legislative act by which a state restores those who have been

guilty of offences against it, to a position of innocence (Oluwatoyin 2011:3). Olsen, Payne and Reiter (2010:806) define it as a process where a state officially declares that those accused or convicted of human rights violations, whether individual or groups, are excused from prosecution, pardoned for their previous crimes, and subsequently released from prison.

Amnesty has also been defined as a strategic state policy which takes a form of executive or legislative clemency and in which offenders, or those involved in illegal actions, are formally pardoned. It is presumed that the moment a person or group is granted amnesty, all records of the person's accusation, trial, conviction, and imprisonment are summarily closed. In order words, upon amnesty, the antisocial acts of a person are totally wiped from the official record, and he/she is considered not only innocent but also as having no legal connection with the crime in the first instance (Schey 1977). An amnesty process is thus one of give-and-take. It requires the recipients to perform certain tasks, such as the willingness to be "amnestised", to provide information, to admit to the truth about their actions, and to show remorse and surrender weapons, as in the case of the militants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The conditional amnesty could be individualized, so that the recipients can only benefit from an amnesty programme upon successful compliance with its conditions (Ogege, 2011).

Amnesty is of different types and kinds. It is categorized into individual amnesty, amnesty movement and mass amnesty. Individual amnesty has to do with a pardon that is extended to an offender. The amnesty movement refers to a programme in which illegal materials or contraband can be turned over to authorities with no repercussions for those who possessed the

Transitional justice is conceptualised as the set ¹ of judicial and non-judicial measures implemented by societies or states to redress legacies of wanton human right abuse. It is a kind of justice

offers when a state or country is transiting from a divided, chaotic, or authoritarian military regime and is hoping to prepare a ground for a post conflict peacebuilding.



illegal materials or contraband. Mass amnesty is provided as a peace offering to a group or collectivists whose actions threaten the cherished values of peaceful existence in the society. These actions could take the form of violent protests, normlessness, or revolution (Henrard 1999).

Despite the controversy and differences associated with amnesty, the rationale behind the granting of amnesty remains relevant. The philosophy behind the design of amnesty is to achieve the following: to alleviate internal pressure, protect state agents from prosecution, promote peace and reconciliation, respond to international pressure, provide reparations, encourage exiles to return and to adhere to religious or cultural traditions and norms (Andreas 2002). The Niger Delta amnesty was designed to build peace and reconciliation to facilitate the beginning of a wide-ranging package of reforms to address the problem of underdevelopment in the region (Moshood 2016). The next segment briefly interrogates culture of violence theory as a theoretical leaning of the study.

Culture of Violence Theory

It is apposite to make a distinction between culture of violence and cultural violence. A culture of violence is said to develop in a situation where acts of violence are perpetrated with impunity, and where violence has become an acceptable means of resolving social, political, and domestic conflicts (Olojede 2018). This is differentiated from when a subcultural group develop norms and values that emphasise the use of physical violence to a greater extent than deem acceptable by the dominant culture (Levinson 1989). Galtung (1990) further clarifies that in the context of cultural violence, only particular and not all aspects of culture play role in the legitimisation of violence. Steenkamp (2005) argues that protracted conflict in countries transiting from violent conflict to a peaceful accord often predisposed such countries in some ways to culture of

violence. He avers that there is a direct link between exposure to violence over a long period of time and acceptance of violence as a means of solving interpersonal conflict or deal with everyday life frustration (Steenkamp 2005 cited in Olojede 2021: 257). Cultural violence that is perpetrated in the name of culture. This cultural violence should not be confused with culture of violence or violent culture as it is used in this paper. Approaches to the study of violence take their point of departure from various disciplines which include social anthropology, history, political science, and others. However, because violence is a social phenomenon, most of its studies emanate from the social sciences. This paper draws its data from socio-anthropological findings to probe the prevalence of violent culture in Nigeria. Accordingly, violent culture in this paper means a situation where a person or group of persons adopt harmful way of existence, where the mode of expression and agitation for lawful and unlawful things in a state is through chaotic means. In other words, when violence becomes a pattern of expression for seeking opportunity in a society.

The Subculture of Violence Theory is a theory created by Franco Ferracuti and Marvin Wolfgang in 1967. It attempted to explain why violent crimes tend to happen more often in certain subcultures. A subculture can be defined as a cultural group that exists within a larger culture (Rollo 2023).

The Subculture of Violence Theory explains that some subcultures view violence as an acceptable or valid way to respond to a perceived personal attack. Their thought is that in those specific subcultures where violence is common, people are more disposed to seeing violence as a solution or a valid response to defend themselves. The study identified were predominantly low-income communities that consisted mostly of ethnic minority groups.



Cultures of violence on other hand are important, as they are the frameworks through which physical aggression is understood, justified, condemned, and controlled. Cultural trends such as a growth in 'sensibility' or 'humanitarianism' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are evidence that increasing numbers of people accepted the new narratives on pain and suffering which were being generated. However, to see such developments purely in cultural terms would underestimate the importance of social figurations, institutional change, and evolved psychology. 'Cultures of honour' are more likely to develop in socio-economic contexts than others, and the reactions and attitudes which compose them have a physio-psychological basis. (Wood 2007:13).

Interestingly, cultures of violence are both robust and fragile. On the one hand, they influence some of the most fundamental beliefs of large numbers of people, thereby playing a role in shaping countless individual conflicts and, alternatively, enabling and repressing many kinds of serious and petty cruelties. However, on an almost daily basis, the contemporary world confronts us with evidence of how rapidly the intricate rules and prohibitions imposed by such cultures can break down (Wood 2007).

Particularly for poor young men, the resort to violence can be a rational strategy to gain status. Cultures of violence provide restrictions on how such conflicts should play out; although the 'rules' can be broken; prevailing cultural codes give people a coherent framework for evaluating their own behaviour and that of others.

Culture has some functional utility, Baldwin et al. (2005 cited in Wood 2007) identify five functional role that culture plays in society which include: guidance, shared identity, value expression, stereotyping, and control. While the functions related to identity (stereotyping,

value expression, shared identity) are useful for delineating groups and inter-group relations, they are not as useful in the context of describing intra-group behaviour. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the other two functions (guidance and control) since they are relevant to explain violent behaviour (Cassaignard-Viaud 2021). The guidance function of culture according to Cassaignard-Viaud (2021) helps individuals relate and deal with their environment, organise group life, solve issues in everyday life, all of which can be summarised as giving order to the world (Baldwin et al. 2005 cited in Cassaignard-Viaud:7). In this sense it regulates behaviour such as violence in society. Specifically, this means providing a sense of (1) when it is acceptable to use violence, (2) gives us (or not) overarching structures to deal with violence or its causes, (3) and how one ought to respond in specific situations. Related to the guidance function is the control function of culture, here specifically intra-group control. By providing an order to the world, culture also de facto makes certain behaviours legitimate and others deviant. In turn, culture justifies and organises the control of group members behaviour through positive and negative sanctions (Cassaignard-Viaud 2021:8).

He further explained the transition of culture to violence. He first focused on norms as one of the components of culture. Weber distinguishes three types of rules understood to make up norms, they include custom, convention, and laws (Weber et al cited in Cassaignard-Viaud). Customs are followed by individual without coercion, conventions are rules, rule which deviation is disapproved and sanctioned by another member of the group. Norms also include laws from which deviations are met with severe punishment (Cassaignard-Viaud 2021: 11). Cassaignard-Viaud (2021) further argues that norms are protected through guidance and social control. When these two are not effective, norms



accordingly gradually mutate and assume another form. For instance, if violence behaviour is not negatively sanctioned by effective law, compensation, or good reward system, it gradually promotes violent behaviour as a new standard of behaviour in a state. This is particularly true about Nigeria where violent entrepreneurs go unpunished. In some instance, such persons could be allowed to nurture their power to the point of where the state will only need to negotiate in order to allow peace to reign. This in some ways, establish a legacy where unsuspecting citizens erroneously assume it pays to adopt violence as means of gaining recognition in a state. The culture of violence theory sits well with the study as against the relative deprivation/frustration aggression theory of Gurr (1970), where frustration resulting from relative deprivation, lack of adequate provision of basic needs may further complicate and reinforce the aggressive behaviour that make violent culture thrive in a society. This is against the backdrop that if reason for violence is because of relative deprivation, the large chunk of the society despite relative deprivation have still not condescended to the abyss of criminality and violence. I will return to this while dissecting amnesty and culture of violence in Nigeria. In the next segment, an in-depth discussion on the course and reason for amnesty form the focus of analysis.

Amnesty in Nigeria

In Nigeria, prior to the declaration of amnesty, the military had carried out massive military bombardment in the region. One of the most significant examples was the military escapade carried out in May 2009 by the military Joint Task Force in the Gbaramatu area of the western Niger Delta, targeting some militia camps and destroying the camps and communities that were suspected of being sympathetic to their cause (Obi 2014). The inability of the military to completely neutralise the insurgents made it necessary to consult

with the militant leaders when the presidency eventually resolved to address the issue through dialogue. Obi (2014) argues that the consultation which later involved the militants and their local sponsors occurred because the militants had demonstrated the capacity to threaten oil interests. While this is true to a large extent, the military exploit was also strategic, as the continuous bombardment of the militant camps made any alternative other than amnesty seem improbable and unreasonable. This the retired Major General Cesare Cecil informed the author, was to compel the militants to see amnesty as a soft landing. So, the Nigerian government used a discreet but subtle military approach to compel obedience. According to a top military general:

Let me tell you amnesty offer is an option. That doesn't mean if you refused to key in initially and you now want to get involved in criminal activities that government will allow you to go free. The military onslaught before amnesty was tactically deployed to compel obedience. There are consequences for every action, if you didn't key into amnesty, and you now want to cause problem, of course you get the full wrath of the law. That is why there is still a task force to maintain security in that place (Personal Communication, Nov. 2014).

This occurred prior to the declaration of amnesty. After the submission, the 44-member Technical Committee inaugurated by the government to advise it on useful ways of resolving conflict in the Niger Delta region came up with useful recommendation. One of the recommendations of this committee is provision of amnesty for the "ex-generals" (i.e., leaders of a group of militants) as they are fondly called. Amnesty, according to the conception of the federal government, is to grant absolute pardon for any militant who unconditionally renounces militancy and puts himself/ herself forward for the necessary disarmament, demobilisation,



and reintegration package of amnesty programme (Moshood 2016).

In June 2009, due to the exigencies of implementing peace in the region, Yar'Adua announced an offer of unconditional amnesty to all militants in the Delta. In addition, the Presidential Committee on Amnesty and Disarmament for Militants under the Minister of the Interior, Major General Godwin Abbe (rtd), was established to execute a post-amnesty programme of socio-economic development in the Niger Delta worth about 50 billion Naira (Adeyeri 2012). The training that former militants received in the Obubra Camp² was the first step at transforming the erstwhile militants and deconstructing their past characterised by militancy. This is expected to give them new orientation about peaceful coexistence and prepare them to become members of civil society. This is to precede the later transformational training that was expected to build the capacity of the militants as useful members of the society. Scholars like Obi (2014) and Ushie (2013) have argued that the government decided to adopt amnesty from the recommendation because of their continuous interest in oil production which has been jeopardised by the conflict. While this is true to a large extent, the need to stabilise the region by ensuring peace cannot be totally ruled out, because without peace, there is hardly any developmental project that can be done.

In accordance with the Amnesty programme, the militants were required to give up their arms and in return they were to receive a Presidential pardon, opportunities for education, training, and general rehabilitation. Agbibo (2014) argues that the amnesty programme was a response to security conditions in the Niger Delta, a response by the then President to reduce fundamentally the violence that was prevalent in the region. After consultation

with stakeholders, it was decided that there was a need to get the militants to lay down their weapons. That was the basis of the amnesty pardon which was meant to stabilise, consolidate, and sustain the security conditions in the Niger Delta region, as a requisite for promoting economic development in the area (*Daily Independent*, June 3, 2012; Agbibo 2014). At the expiration of the October 4, 2009 deadline set by the Federal government for the agitators to disarm, virtually all the key militants had yielded to the amnesty deal. Available records indicate that a total of 8,299 militants registered with the Presidential Implementation Committee. The management of the programme from the period of disarmament, demobilisation, and up to the reintegration stage has been carefully implemented by the officials. However, at the inception, the programme suffered some setbacks especially due to the death of the former President Yar'Adua. His sickness and later demise hampered the speed at which some of the decisions that required his consent – such as the release of funds and further extension of amnesty to the willing militants. Also, the politics surrounding whether the vice president could assume the presidency after the president's death also contributed to a lull in the programme. In laying down arms, the militants were expected to go to the nearest screening centre to turn in their arms and ammunitions, take the oath of renunciation of armed violence, and subsequently receive presidential amnesty, after which the repentant militant would be registered for a rehabilitation and reintegration programme (Obi 2014; Agbibo 2014; Oluwatoyin 2011). A top military general informed the author that at this point the ex-militants were given the UN code which implies that in spite of the fact that the

Obrubra is located in Cross River State in Nigeria. ² The camp is where the former militants were demobilised, housed, and taught non-violent

methods before they were sent out for further training.



programme was home-grown, it has UN blessing. In his words:

Everybody that went through the amnesty has a UN code, but what I just want you to know is that it is a novel idea; this is one of the few cases of countries that went through the DDR process at its own initiative, at its own expenses, at its own effort (Personal communication Nov. 2014).

During the demobilisation phase in Ogburn, there was collaboration with the Martin Luther King Centre in United States as well as peace-building outfits in South Africa. The ex-militants were taught principles of non-violence as advocated by Martin Luther King. At the end of that exercise, the reintegration component kick-started. During the demobilisation stage, the delegates at that programme were brought into camp, processed, and interviewed before the necessary placement was done. According to Mr Lawrence Pepple- the technical head to presidential amnesty:

You will learn their health concern, their economic concern, their request, and various other things they will need. Some of them as at the time we brought them you can even be moving them for surgery, because some came with bullet injuries that had stayed with them for years, some of them are tuberculosis infected, some are HIV positive, so, their concerns were now taken over by us (Personal Communication Nov. 2014).

The technical head noted that ‘the militants were being removed from their comfort zone so to speak, they were in their palace, their camps, and their creeks, removing them, you are removing them from their means of livelihood’ (Personal Communication, Nov. 2014). In addition, ‘they have in those camps means of physical security and social security, their weapons were providing them means of livelihood and social security’ (Personal Communication, Nov. 2014). To remove their weapons from their hands, you needed to replace it with something, in the interim. Because of this, they were placed

on ‘monthly stipends of sixty-five thousand naira, that will cover feeding, some bit of accommodation challenges, while we are settling to move them to the reintegration component of the DDR’ (Personal Communication, Nov. 2014).

The reintegration phase was the most challenging of all the phases because while all other phases are tangible and you can count the number of arms collected, the number of people demobilised and so on. Reintegration is more of attitudinal change which comes because of both psychological changes and the opportunity that the programme has to initiate those changes. The process which preceded this phase is the training of ex-militant in their areas of choice. Some of them were sent to learn vocation and some went through formal education in Nigeria and Ivy League schools around the world. With the calibre of training and exposure received by the ex-militants, it becomes almost impossible that such people may want to go back to the creek. Now, there is a value already added to the live of individual and the fear of prosecution has also been obliterated with amnesty granted.

A cursory look of amnesty programme in Nigeria revealed that the Nigerian situation necessitated the need to use amnesty as compensation for the heinous crime of the state against the people in the Niger Delta. The circumstances that led to militancy in the first place in Nigeria is largely caused by the state. Hence, the probable things to do to achieve peace when militancy has gone awry is to grant the perpetrators of crime amnesty. The case of Boko Haram could also be attributed to a failing state syndrome which necessitated in the first instance some group to take arm against the state. This failing state thesis also explains why some people may have been lured or forced into such group. This is not to confuse the reasons for militancy in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram and Banditry in the northeast and northwest as similar. The mode of operation of various



groups are also dissimilar, while militancy only attack government installations and target expatriate, the methodology of Boko Haram and Bandits is dastardly as they kill and kidnap indiscriminately, at times, the goals and reasons of the groups is blurred. Despite this, the state failure thesis still explains why all these groups fester. To reduce the rank of the terrorists and allow for peace to reign eventually may explain the reason why amnesty was granted to the terrorists, this will be discussed further in the next segment. The point of emphasis is that the context, and conditions which necessitated conflict in the first place to a large extent may determine the format the resolution will take. The questions which beg for answer is that could there be justification for the call for amnesty for the bandit and Boko Haram in the first instance? In what ways could such calls promote a culture of violence? Is it save for the conflict entrepreneur to assume there will always be offer of amnesty to resolve conflict at any given time there is conflict? The next session discusses the impact of amnesty on culture of violence in Nigeria.

Amnesty and culture of violence in Nigeria: An introspection

The need to find lasting solution resulted into the amnesty offer which was granted to the Niger Delta militant to restore peace and prepare the ground for development in the region (Moshood 2016). While the government was seeking solution to the Niger Delta militancy, the Boko Haram terrorist activity has worsened the security situation in the northeast by 2009. In recent times, the activity of bandits in the northwest and the farmers harder's conflict have reduced food production which has affected the cost of food. The secessionist drive in the southeast lingers till today as people still find it difficult in the region to move freely especially on Monday despite government promise to guarantee safety of lives. The cult activities in the southwest and incessant robbery attack have come to confirm that perhaps Nigerians have come

to realisation that the only means for getting things done in the country is through violent means.

The situation in Nigeria tends to corroborate the entrenched culture of violence thesis by Steenkamp (2005). Where he avers that there is high propensity to adopt a violent attitude to resolving issues if a people or a community have been exposed to violence for a long period of time. The Nigerian case seems to fit into this thesis, for instance, the military as of 1999 has ruled the country for 28 years out of 39 years since independence. This, accordingly, has greater impact on the people psyche because the methodology of the military is force which has percolated the nook and cranny of the country. Also, the initial peaceful approach adopted by the Niger Delta people did not achieve result until they took up arm against the state, this may have a contagion effect as other ethnic groups in the country due to lackluster disposition of the government may have erroneously assumed, they could only achieve their aim through violent means. The frustration aggression thesis helps to explain why the frustration across various region of the country has led into adopting a violent culture to achieving what they want in the state.

While it may be misleading to situate the Boko Haram terrorist activities and its cohorts, banditry and secessionist drive together. The common feature is that the state has failed Nigerian people in many ways. The tricky nature of Nigerian situation makes the matter messier. What some Nigerians understood as justice is given to other regions what a particular region has been given. Whereas what Nigeria requires is equity. The equity in this instance means giving to a particular set of people what they required at a time, not given the same thing to everyone even when the other people do not need it. Just about the time amnesty was granted to the Niger Delta Militants, there have been calls



as early as 2013 that amnesty should also be given to the Boko Haram terrorist group, this is the contagion effect which the weakness in leadership, the lacuna in the development pattern of the country has created, a point that I will return to shortly. At this point, it is necessary to claim unequivocally that the Niger Delta situation or the agitation which led to the declaration of amnesty and the Boko Haram insurgency are not the same. The ethno-religious politics in the country is over stretch to the point in the country where other region always want the government to replicate what is done elsewhere to them. For instance, some people argue that what sauce for the goose should equally sauce for the gander, i.e., if the Niger Delta militants could be granted amnesty, nothing stops the government from extending same to the Boko Haram. Interestingly, the government just about the time they granted amnesty to the Niger Delta militants also extended same to the Boko Haram terrorist group. Unfortunately, the Shekau group did not accept it saying that the state lacks the capacity to deal with their onslaught that was the reason they offered them amnesty (Bakindo 2013). On the part of government, they argue that granting amnesty to Boko Haram will afford those who were coerced or lured into the group a window of opportunity to renounce, and those who willingly want to renounce the dreaded group the opportunity to do so, this position was confirmed by the helms man in charge of Operation Safe Corridor Lt General Adeosun in the course of my interview with him. More so, it is cost effective for government to offer amnesty than continue to use its resources to procure weapon to prosecute the war (Bukarti 2019). While this may sound reasonable, it also further confirms the state failure thesis, where the government grapple with providing effective security for its citizenry. Responding to question on the similarity of operation safe corridor for

the Boko Haram terrorist group and amnesty programme in the Niger Delta Major General Adeosun said:

Operation Safe Corridor is not holistically the same with the amnesty in the Niger Delta, there might be some semblances but in the real sense of it, they are not the same. Operation Safe Corridor actually was a way of trying to separate those people who were not the core criminals, or core insurgents, or core terrorists, separate them, try to see how to de-radicalise them, and how they can be re-integrated into the society (Personal Communication Feb, 2024).

From the foregoing, while amnesty provided opportunity for the Niger Delta militants to down their tools and accept the pathway for development, Operation Safe Corridor was aimed at deradicalizing the repentant Boko Haram and give them opportunity for development and reintegration into the society. In 2020, the Katsina state government offered amnesty to bandits to enhance security in the state. This amnesty eventually failed because no sooner than the government entered a peace accord with one group of bandits than another one began to foment troubles. There are various set of groups in the region focusing on different criminality. There is some whose trade is illegal mining, some specialise in kidnapping for ransom while some are cattle rustlers. The group of bandits in the region were diverse and uncoordinated it became difficult to know the set of bandits to negotiate with thus the amnesty failed. There has been increase in cattle rustling and criminality in Katsina and the governor has vowed not to grant amnesty to bandit anymore (Michael 2020).

While critics of the amnesty programme often draw attention to its contagious effects (Abayomi 2021), the debilitating impacts and effects of violence often force government to consider it as an option. In corroborating this, Major General Bamidele avers, reluctantly agreeing to the fact that amnesty in the Niger Delta may have caused a somewhat culture of violence in the country. In his world:



Well, eh, I think to some extent the amnesty in the Niger Delta has brought about the fact that peace, there will always be need to resolve conflicts outside the use of guns so, that is why everywhere there is conflict, you find some school of thought believe that look we need to talk to the belligerents, let us do things in their own light and see how best issues can be resolved. Even in the course of the discourse, issues of amnesty, the issues of pardon come up, fine but I think the amnesty in the Niger Delta actually brought about the realisation that conflict can be resolved peacefully (Personal Communication, Feb. 2024).

In similar vein, Lt General Adeosun equally agrees that perhaps, amnesty granted the Niger Delta militants might have served as a motivation to other criminal element in the state to seek amnesty for their wrong doings. In his world, he avers:

In the very simplistic form, Niger Delta amnesty has served as motivation for criminals to seek the same, and it has no justification anywhere except for political manipulations. I will say this is my own understanding and perception over this because the situations are really not the same. The Niger Delta people, they are sitting on the resources that is sustaining the country largely and overtime it has been crying marginalisation, against not developing the Niger Delta where all these things come from, even environmental degradation was not being attended to... so with all these, they have more reasons for them to agitate and knowing that they have something to hold on to when they frustrate the flow of the only resource....so having said that, you discover that people were just trying to play politics with the bandit groups as well as Boko Haram. What were they really bringing to the table? Nothing except attempt to carve out some part of Nigeria for themselves and that is, for Boko Haram which is a serious offence against the State, so doing this and some people want to score political cheap point. People coming around to say give them amnesty, on what basis? Somebody that killed your father, your mother or rape your sister in the process

and take up arms against other people you say they should give such a person amnesty. What is the justification? It is really sad the way we politicise every good, bad and ugly thing in Nigeria (Personal Communication, Feb 2024).

As it has been established above, that there may be reason to advocate for amnesty for some Boko Haram conscripted, while this is true in some situations, it is not entirely relevant in all situations. For instance, the situation which warranted amnesty for the Niger Delta militants cannot be compared to that of Boko Haram or Bandits. As Major General Shafa argued that 'the negligence and degradation of Niger Delta region necessitated the conflict in the first instance'. A similar example is the case reported by Bukarti (2019) talking on the reintegration process of Boko Haram terrorist group in the northern part of Nigeria. He highlighted the case of a fighter whom at the time of his report was eighteen years old and have spent five years in the group, rising to the rank of a general and has been involved in leading raids over 16 villages. In the words of the eighteen-year-old:

After what I have gone through here, I would never go back to Sambisa Forest. I would never harm even a fly again. I have learnt basic literacy, numeracy in the past 11 months. I can write my name and even recite national anthem (Bukarti 2019).

Modu, a pseudonym for the eighteen-year-old, has reported by Bukarti (2019) plans to set up a shoe repair business which he has learnt from the reintegration camp and plan to go back to school. What this means is that somebody has failed somewhere, which is the reason someone like Modu could not get education and was forced into Boko Haram at a tender age. Just as referenced by Major General Shafa the method perpetrators seem to employ is to exploit the innocence and naivety of teenagers and adolescents and use them as instrument to achieve their dastardly act. Also, retired Major General Bamidele said



some of the reason Operation Safe Corridor was established was to pilot the deradicalisation process is to ensure that there is peace in the North East. In his world he argued that ‘the programme was established to encourage the low-profile Boko Haram fighters, who themselves are victim of circumstances’. This set of people according to him ‘form the large number of combatants to surrender and embrace peace’. He retorted with a rhetorical question that:

Why do I say they are victims of circumstances? Majority of the people were conscripted, majority of them joined for their survival and safety, safety of their families, so it is necessary to give opportunities to them, bring alternatives for them to come out, surrender their weapons and go through a programme to de-radicalise them from radical ideology that Boko Haram have been able to impact on them (Personal communication Feb 2024).

Similarly, Lt General Adeosun corroborates this statement when he said ‘Operation Safe Corridor actually was a way of trying to separate those people who were not the core criminals, or core insurgents, or core terrorists, separate them, try to see how to de-radicalise them, and how they can be re-integrated into the society’.

Cases like this is one of the reasons amnesties cannot be totally excluded in achieving peace and societal healing. Like many scholars have argued, they opined that if amnesty becomes inevitable, such amnesty must incorporate both the perpetrators and the victims, by extension the whole society (Bukarti 2019; Moshood 2016; Meira 2010). It must not be a situation where criminals are compensated and the victims are left to bear the brunt.

What is inferred from various submissions in the study is that amnesty though might have served as a reason some people may want to score cheap political point, it does not necessarily encourage the spread of violent culture, but weak governance does. The failure of leadership which has

accumulated overtime has further exacerbated the weakness of the state (Achebe 1983, Osaghae 2002). This, coupled with entrenched military interregnum has not only heighten palpable militarism in the country but has also impacted on cultural attitude of the citizenry. There is low reward for good deeds, diligent workers are not paid good salary and faithful and obedient civil servants are not rewarded for their obedience and stewardship. Yet criminals perpetrate their crimes without repercussion and spend proceed of crime without questioning. All these heighten corrupt practices and the promotion of violent culture. Preponderance of the interviewees agreed that to solve the ensuing culture of violence, the root causes of the problem needed to be tackled. Including governance deficit, unemployment, arresting the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, tackling substance abuse, again the family as a unit where norms and ethical values are learnt has been shattered, hence, the level of corruption has heightened. Major General Bamidele counsel that ‘there can never be a society without the family, parental care is lacking in Nigeria today. Most parents don’t have hand grip of their children, you don’t blame them, economic factors and what have you are partly responsible for this’. Corroborating this, Lt General Adeosun said ‘the family value has eroded. Community value is shattered, it all a free fall, he avers:

Where lies the values? So, we have collectively done too much to destroy the value system in our country. Those days we know right from primary school we know about civics, right from primary school you know what a national anthem is, right from primary school you can recite your national pledge, ask a youth corper today to recite national pledge, he doesn’t know, after so many years in the university. I am just mentioning these things to say we need to regenerate ourselves, re-evaluate ourselves and make up our



minds as a people. What is causing much violence today emanate from that, in the community, no new person enters a community without going to the Bale or the Chief's house, it is from there they will guide him to wherever he is going and why he came into that community must be known. Today, does that happen? It doesn't happen, today your son is in the secondary school or university, you are the one struggling to pay his school fees, from nowhere he drives Camry car to the house with plenty money and give you money and you didn't ask him, where he gets it. These are issues that we cannot wish away, no, we are all contributing to all these, so we now go into body polity, the way we run our politics will continue to destroy Nigeria. Why? It is winner takes all, if you don't have money, you can't be in politics. Even if you don't have money, you must go and borrow, if you want appointment, you must pay, then if I am looking for work and I have to pay before I am given the work, am I really going to do that work to satisfy the country or to satisfy the person that gave me the job or I have to first of all look for how to pay back the bill? Our politics, our democracy is too expensive, and until we are able to find a way round that, there is going to be continuous problem. Most of these people eventually turn to orgy of violence, as we speak, the whole 36 states of the federation have one form of vigilante or bodyguard or whatever, different from the Police, different from Amotekun, different from Eastern Security Network, when they use these people to win election, they cannot continue with them, they have already equipped them with arms, and with double barrel or single barrel with cartridges and what have you, when you have weapon with you and you have nothing to do, no money is with you, you use the weapon to look for money. This is the problem, we talk of Egbesu Boys, we talk of Bakassi Boys, you talk of, all these are political thugs in different names. The polity must be restructured; even Nigeria must be recalibrated for a true federation. These are clichés that will continue to repeat, we are paying lip service to it, nobody is saying Nigeria should disintegrate, no, but the components must feel as equal

components (Personal Communication Feb. 2024).

It is cleared from the above statement that the culture of violence pervades everywhere, in the form of various ethnic militia just for survival purposes. The youth that have been mobilised for political selfish reason, and where not properly demobilised use the weapons in their disposal as means of survival. Amnesty offers, while it can be argued that it allowed the innocent people who have been conscripted into banditry, militia group or Boko Haram to have safe haven to return to the society, amnesty is also used by the government to cover their tract where they have failed in their responsibility as a government. Some people equally used amnesty to score cheap political point. All these directly impact on the ensuing culture of violence in the country. It is therefore, hopeful that when the root causal factors are addressed, redressing the ensuing violent culture in the country will be easy to achieve.

3. Conclusion

The intractability of conflict in most cases often resulted to seeking an option where there will be a win-win situation. Amnesty as it has been argued in the paper offered an option for a non-violent alternative to peace. The need for peace and development also necessitated the reason amnesty was an option for the Niger Delta militants. This, ironically become an albatross for peace in Nigeria where criminals, bandits and Boko Haram also seek amnesty. As argued in the paper that although there may be a good reason why some people may deserve amnesty especially among those who were coerced into Boko Haram, the good reason also is that government has failed in its responsibility to provide security and basic necessity of life for its citizens. The worst security and economic situations easily predisposed people to criminal groups. The fact that government has also been unable to bring perpetrators of crime to book make



it appears that the government is not capable to secure its territory on the one hand, and encourage criminal element to fester in their criminal acts. The offer of amnesty to criminals is seen as a weakness on the part of the state which portend dangerous precedence which can further escalate and encourage recourse to violence and criminality. When criminality becomes lucrative without negative repercussion, this will naturally portend bad signal where everyone will think it pays to be violent for one to gain the attention of the state. The paper recommends that amnesty should be used sparingly only when it becomes necessary. Also, when it becomes necessary to offer amnesty, both the victims and the perpetrators of the crime should be included in the package. The government needs to increase its capacity in the areas of providing basic needs of life for the people. Government should be more proactive providing security and social amenities such as good education and secured environment where human potentials can be realised. The research implications therefore are that henceforth amnesty programme should always include both victims and perpetrator of crime in amnesty programme and packages. This, on the one hand will assuage frayed nerves and aid proper reintegration process on the other hand. Also, the capacity to deal with criminality from the root will stem criminal activities in the country, this should be prioritised by the government. Government should introduce a reward system where diligent citizens are rewarded for their hard work. It is also established in the study that prolonged conflict has tendency of making violent culture emblematic of some people who are exposed to conflict. Further studies, may therefore seek to interrogate the level of exposure to conflict before it becomes entrenched in the psyche and ways of a people.

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