Nigerian Family Values Amidst Security Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Security problem has been the greatest challenges the Nigerian family and the present administration is tackling. But the conceptualization of security and the approach tends to be misdirected. The undue emphasis on national security, terrorism, physical combat and application of sophisticated gadgets, though necessary, are not sufficient to check it. The security challenges gives a big question mark on our values bearing in mind that values are not static but dynamic with time and space. The family as an institution, if properly empowered, parents play their divine role efficiently, the issue of security will be a thing of the past. Hence, the axiom that if the family is secured, the nation is secured because the maxim say that "security does not lie on the barrel of the gun but with the people" (family). The paper tries to espouse the idea that family security is much more relevant and therefore attention should be focused in this direction for some wholesome result.

INTRODUCTION

The most important attribute of any family or nation is security. This is because without family security, other forms of security cannot thrive or flourish. The essence of any government is the provision of a secured environment and enabling conditions for the citizens to pursue their legitimate activities. Even Section 14 Sub-Section 2(b) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria says that; the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. It will therefore be safe to say that a country's development, its integrity, the citizens' willingness to subordinate to authority and even the legitimacy of a nation depends entirely on the family basic ability to provide adequate security to its household first. Thus according to Ita (2011), security therefore is a situation where individuals or groups are protected from fears, uncertainty, anxiety and other disruptive activities.

Since independence, the Nigerian family history has been littered with declining values, broken pieces of unfulfilled promises, failed expectations and dashed hope. The families have been on a crossroad, "this is why many people say Nigeria has broken my heart" (Ita, 2011:8).

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS
Family:

The family is the fundamental unit of social life. Everybody starts life in the family and all other known human institutions grew out of the family. The formation or the origin of family continues to remain a mystery judging from the universality of the concept. In the words of Horton & Hunt (1981), if society is to survive, people must find some workable and dependable ways of paring up, conceiving and raising children, caring for them and the aged and carrying out certain other functions.

In traditional societies of the world and in Africa, all human activities revolve around the family circle; therefore, it was the only organised institutions known to them by then. Horton & Hunt went further to give a satisfactory definition of an institution by stating that it is an organised system of social relationships which embodies certain common VALUES and PROCEDURES and meets certain basic needs of society.

Fundamentally therefore, entering into the family is conducted through the concept of marriage and there is no society that takes it casually, neither would two adult human beings enter into the act arbitrarily. Even though today people are living together bearing children; marriage with its divine nature and universal adoption is too important for such casual arrangement. On this premise therefore, Bogardus (1954, in Nmom, 2002) sees marriage as an institution admitting men and women to family life; that is living in the intimate personal relationship of husband and wife for the primary purpose of begetting and rearing and children.

But Nanda (1980 in Nmom, 2002) has a more deep-rooted definition that is comprehensive, very traditional, Africa and Nigerian, when she says that marriage refers to the customs, rules, and obligation that establish a special relationship between a sexually cohabiting adult male and female, between them and the kin groups of husband and wife. A look at this definition establishes the fact that a particular marriage pattern of a given society is cultural.

In line with marriage as an entry point, Burgess (1963, in Nmom, 2002) defines family as a group of persons united by ties of blood or adoption, constituting a single household; interacting and communicating with

each other in their respective social roles of husband, wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister, and creating and maintaining a common culture. In these concepts, there abound different forms and types which the paper would not like to go into.

Value:

Value is a major concept in this write-up but the unfortunate thing about the concept is that everyone believes her/she knows what value is and what it is all about. The word is slippery and very situational or sometimes relative; thus very murky and with elastic definitions. In any case, a functional definition is necessary, though may not be value-free; this is because its objectivity is tainted by individual perception and experience. In spite of all ambiguity common value still exist due to common consensus of what is good or evil.

Hornby (2000) briefly defined values as the belief about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. On a broader note, Johnson & Oguntade (2002) see values as an individual or community embraced principles that guide personal or communal relationships. In essence, values are general and abstract principles to which members of social units are deeply committed. They are beliefs about what is desirable and what is undesirable which reflect the culture of a society and which is widely shared by the members (Nmom, 2003). In this vein therefore, family values is defined by its features of discipline, humility, hardwork, mutual respect, integrity, fidelity, sexual chastity and general hospitality. This is the core concept of the paper

In all human societies, several basic functions must be performed. For instance new members are born and socialized, the necessities of life must be provided, order must be maintained, relationships must be defined and understood, and life must somehow be regulated for the welfare of the greater number. Every one of these vital functions is the responsibility of a social system; this is where the issue of security comes in. In essence, where these conditions are not fulfilled, there is bound to be disharmony leading to anarchy, which hinges on anomic state/society and some security challenges in any given society. This forms the crux of the second part of this paper.

THE NATURE OF THE FAMILY TODAY

In as much as security problem is important, we must briefly examine the family itself because the family has been and remains primarily responsible for children rearing. The prevailing myth is that the nuclear family is the ultimate and self-sufficient unit in which parent alone are responsible for the child (Keniston, 1977). Some hundred years ago, on the family farm, the mythology has some truth because the family was large, fairly isolated, economically self-sufficient and uneducated. As society become more complex, urbanized, prosperous and mobile, the myth was redefined so that the family was supposed to be a "heaven in the heartless of world" of cold, cruel, economic competition (Lasch, 1977). This situational definition of issues in our society has been the bane of security challenges in Nigeria and the family institutions is at the receiving end. Thus for the poor and working class of Nigerians, the reality never come close to either myth, but for the middle (if it actually exist in Nigeria today) and the upper class family life did partially fit the ideals. Yet the myth of peaceful family life and self-sufficiency live on. Also, when a child turns out to be good or bad, the parents are either praised or blamed as though the parents were totally responsible.

Nevertheless, one's own family, however, remains very important. It is the quality of family life (its emotional climate) that now begins to have a major effect on a child and make for individual differences in many of his personality and social development (Weiner & Elkind, 1972). Although the quality of family life is only partially related to its position in the larger social structure, the social position of the family is a primary source for a child's own identity which stands as a check in his later behaviour (Otten, 1981).

THE SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE FAMILY TODAY

Security comprehensively aptly can be adduced to be a total peaceful state of the mind of an individual, the groups, the state, the nation at a particular point in time and space. It may not be an absence of violence or some sort of physical assault or some disruptions but a relative peace that can guarantee quality of life and social cohesion for the survival of the individual, group or nation (mine).

With the experienced decadence in family values in the contemporary society, Nigerian family and other parts of the world are faced with security problems. The several militia groups in Nigeria e.g. Niger Delta militants, the OPC and the Bakassi group attest to this. There is also the menace of illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping, street violence and cultism in schools. These challenges have therefore created new measures to significantly increase the level of security amongst individual, the family, the community, the corporate bodies and the state. The magnified security threat in the world is further oiled by the globalized activities in different endeavours of man. The family and world over is facing the worst level of security threat far beyond the capacity of

state and governments and encouraging a pauperization of family as an institution. In this view therefore, it becomes obvious that there is a missing link to the problem of security – and that link is the family security which is the basis and the starting point of demystifying this security problem.

Unequivocally, security in the family is very crucial and as important as the much taunted or glamorized national security. Although may not be perceived as such hence its treatment and interpretation but it does constitute a very serious social problem. This is because several conditions in the society, especially those affecting the family have been described as the problems of the society. They vary in range and type from family to family and society to society and a product of its social life. The problem of one period of time or era do not necessarily become problem of another period; just as security of the family and the nation has constituted a big social problem today. The problems of society may or do continue, disappear or lesson with changes in the society so as the values of the family will also change and adjust to the new prevailing conditions.

It is also pertinent to inform that the conditions that constitute a social problem like security in society never receive full agreement hence value conflict by the members of the society. It is in fact that such disagreement that make for social problems. Merton (1973) in acceding to this disagreement on what a problem is, said that:

> The first and basic ingredient of a social problem consists of a substantial discrepancy between held standards and actual conditions of social life. Such discrepancies vary on extent and in degree of importance assigned them so that social problems are regarded as differing in magnitude as well as kind.

This disagreement as pointed above in identifying family or national security importance may give rise to a problem that may obstruct solutions of the original social problem (Nmom, 2000). Fortunately for Africans and Nigeria in particular, the cushion effect of the extended family system in which in reality agree that the modern family everywhere now is dependent not self-sufficient as espoused by the myth give us some leverage of hope.

The security problem in the family currently are numerous, though some are physical, others are psychological in nature. Financially, nearly all Nigerian families are dependent upon wages. The family farm(s) or economy in most rural communities and urban areas is nearly nonexistent, bearing in mind the mass exodus of able bodied youths to the urban areas in search of white collar jobs which killed the traditional economy and weakened the traditional values and the family institution. Also, only very few families live on their investments. That means parents work outside the home, according to the dictates of employers, who determine schedules, time off, places of residence, and frequency of moves, pay levels, promotions and retirement times, etc.

All these make family life difficult in this modern time. Since children are born, need to go to school, need to go the doctor, have to attend meetings and do a hundred other things that do not fit into rigid work schedules. Career prospects, meetings and association events have become more important for working spouse than the care and well being of the family. In nearly every case, job demands take precedence over family needs.

Family independence is further undermined by the educational system, which not infrequently promotes values and behaviour(s) that are at odds with those of the parents and some traditional values and norms; there is the every present television which the average child even adult watches for two to four hours a day filled with some (permit me the use) stupid and socially destructive programmes. Currently, the new social media, the facebook, the twitter, internet and others have taken a toll in our social life and family upbringing.

From the above, it is obvious that the family security is threatened. This is in terms of peace at home, stability, cohesion, solidarity, growth, reciprocity, mutual trust, brotherhood, integrity, and what have you. The assaults are manifested in unemployment, militancy, divorce, desertion of spouse, neighbourhood crime and violence, even substance abuse to mention but a few. Nigerian families are currently securing themselves either providing all the necessary things to sustain life like house, water, education, means of livelihoods, social and psychological protections. The families in their wisdom, due to lack of provisions, unconcerned attitude of various government(s) over the years, are also involved in physical protections of their various family members, kin groups and neighbourhood by engaging in group and private security arrangements.

The atmosphere of corruption which has been socialized in Nigeria and accepted as a new way of life and means of survival has devastated the cherished values of our traditional family institutions. Not only on the family as a unit of social relations, but the moral decadence in the society has so much battered the psyche of the individual, the family and the society that the moral fibre of the society is lost (Agbese, 1993). A lack of moral compass has enveloped the family and society at large, along with an increasing emphasis on materialistic goal (Nmom, 2003). Selfish individualism has promoted a culture of greed and indifference in the feelings of others; giving rise to a state of hopelessness. These are pointer to insecurity at homes which definitely manifest negatively at both the community and national level.

The family institution which ought to provide guidance and shield through effective parenting for the youths has suffered a terrible breakdown. According to Wokocha (2002) the quest for materialism, the

phenomenon of abject penury and tragic-comedic urbanization have conspired to rob the families of their values and virtues. The breakdown of family value today partly provides a significant answer for the degeneracy noticeable in Nigerian youths (these are the used instrument of physical violence and security breaches the country is facing).

The family has derelicted in its socialization functions via effective parenting which should have aided significantly in weaning the youths from the cancerous breast of misdemeanour. Wokocha (2002) went further to say that parents are currently the embezzlers, murderers, cultists, dupers and plunders of our Nigerian society. Youth watch what parents do and being at the impressionable age, copy them. When such dereliction from the family, the negative attitudes of parents, and the embrace from the youths, the complain of security both at the family and the nation should not arise because the build-up has been gradual and obvious. If the society is to survive, security problem must be checked, parents must respect not just the internal norms of the family and society, but most perform the divinely-assigned role as expressed in Proverbs 22:6 "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it*".

CONCLUSION

Nigeria therefore stands out in the midst of intimidating challenges of grappling with myriads of security threats facing us. These challenges range from underdevelopment to food security, housing security, educational and others considered to be fundamental human right to existence. Also of note is our weak culture generally and weak political and democratic culture. These threats which have affected the family have equally aggravated the insecurity to the levels that should be comprehensively checked to save the family and country. This is why Furley & May (2006) looking at Africa, which Nigeria is the big brother bearing that out of every five (5) Africans, one (1) is a Nigerian, puts the situation clearly when they said that:

> *Africa is a continent wracked wars, full of "hopeless" cases, where peace, if it does break out, can be tenous, full of unresolved rivalries and tensions, liable to be temporary and viewed as unsatisfactory by many participants.*

Thus according to Nte & Eke (2008), this pessimistic reality of the continent (family) is cyclically linked with unprecedented levels of resource competitions as a result of irresponsible leadership and corruption. Family as an institution cannot be insulated from this malaise because their actions are human perpetrated from a declining family ethos in our various communities. Also the frustrations generated therefore create some senseless social vices which invariable affects the family. Today, the country is inundated with new threats arsing from unprecedented security problems from the family level, the community, the local government, the state and the nation which obviously have greatly questioned the legitimacy of the family as an institution that was once cherished and adored to us as a people.

Unfortunately, there is little information concerning the every day impact of security upon family. However, we do know how it may, or may not affect marital bliss, or blight, role of mothers, methods of child rearing, authority area, care of the aged, reaction to birth, death, friendship patterns, happiness of the life of children, financial priorities, or any of those other things that make up the daily life of the families.

Within this framework, the overall conclusion is that organised security has no coercive allies, and certainly no arms of its own. Its financial power is quite limited and the normatic power of ethical application seems weak. In general though, the everyday institution(s) where we live, love, work die, play, study and achieve operate according to principles and interests which lie beyond and sometimes in contradiction to our expected values.

Finally, in spite of modernity and the new drive for nuclear family, the importance of extended family continues to hold sway in our society. Its integrative values, norms of reciprocity and mutual trust create everlasting family bond help to checkmate insecurity in our family. Though on the decline, the importance to our social life cannot be jettisoned easily in our system. According to Obunimi (2012), it is of note that Nigerian in Diaspora continue to send money home to help relatives to meet pressing need, this demonstrates that in spite of the fact that these Nigerians are living and working in the nuclear family setting more common to the Western world, there is still the strong pull and unity of the extended family system in the support of relations far away, a very central value of our family system. Therefore, security of the family is the security of the nation.

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