

## Insurgency in Nigeria: Addressing the causes as part of the solution

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### Summary

*Taking a cue from recent pronouncements by Chief Justice Dahiru Musdapher on the current precarious situation in Nigeria, this article examines the issues raised by the learned Chief Justice and concludes that none of those issues, working alone, is capable of making Nigeria a failed state. The one exception is the issue of insurgency, which is growing in strength and sophistication and becoming quite ominous for Nigeria. The article examines the growth of various insurgency movements in Nigeria, noting the strengths and impact of each and their potential to destabilise the country to the point of state failure and possible disintegration. The article then addresses the causative factors of insurgency in Nigeria, including the religious and ideological discontent which appears to be propelling the current conflict in Northern Nigeria. The article then considers some of the policy options for addressing these causes and conflict and recommends, among other measures, the establishment of a constitutional body – a supreme council for interreligious conflict – to function as a final arbiter in all interreligious conflicts that are potentially explosive conflicts that threaten a serious breach of the peace.*

### 1 Introduction: Nigeria on the brink

Nigeria is at a dreadful precipice. Observers of the country and everyone with any interest in it must be very concerned about what the fallout would be should it be unable to surmount its current problems. The problems are a complex blend of social, political, ethnic, legal and constitutional problems which now bedevil the country in proportions never before experienced in the turbulent and checkered history of this potentially great nation. There is now a dangerous escalation of terrorist campaigns with all the hallmarks of

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insurgency. Religion may well add to the unending list of Nigeria's woes, as it appears to dominate the essential character of the current campaign of insurgency. Ironically, it could well portend a catastrophe, if not properly managed alongside other instruments of state policy. This article examines the problem areas articulated by the former Chief Justice Dahiru Musdapher concerning causative factors of insurgency and instability in Nigeria, and proposes a solution utilising an institutional framework that incorporates both religious and political actors.

Nigeria is at the moment at a crossroads. At the end of the day, given the dynamics of the turbulence in the polity, policy choices will certainly dictate whether Nigeria can survive as a state or fail and splinter into fledgling micro-mini states. The indicators are glaring, profuse and ominous. The immediate past Chief Justice of Nigeria, retired Justice Dahiru Musdapher, recently summarised the situation with the observation that<sup>1</sup>

Boko Haram insurgency, political violence, corruption, nepotism, tribalism, indiscipline, abduction and kidnappings, armed robbery, murder and extortion, bombings of places of worship and innocent Nigerians are all the indicators of a failing state.

More generally, and more ominously, Chief Justice Musdapher maintained:<sup>2</sup>

Nigeria is clearly a nation at war with itself. The path we are treading is a threat to the continued peace, unity and prosperity of this land we call our home ... This is not the Nigeria we inherited from our predecessors, this is not the Nigeria we envisioned as young men. Favouritism, nepotism and tribal sentiments have made it impossible to run a merit driven system. Hard work, brilliance, honesty and integrity in our dealings are no longer rewarded. Rather we celebrate mediocrity soaked in the corruption we claim is our common enemy. I am scared and deeply worried. The situation is grave.

Ultimately, the former Chief Justice emphasised, '[t]hese social upheavals clearly threaten the survival of the Nigerian nation and we all have a duty to rise and stem the tide'.<sup>3</sup>

From the above portrayal, it may not be wrong to conclude with the Chief Justice that Nigeria is a 'failing' or, indeed, a failed state. The situation in Nigeria now has been characterised as being worse than Mohammed Farrah Aidid's Somalia or, indeed, Yugoslavia following the death of Marshal Tito. The problem is that, if the slide is not checked in good time, the fallout and trauma in the Nigerian case is likely to be worse than Yugoslavia and Somalia put together. To understand what exactly Chief Justice Musdapher meant, it is instructive to understand and appreciate each of the phenomena the respected judge mentioned. In the process, it will be necessary to

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1 D Musdapher 'Media and democracy' *National Mirror* 21 December 2012 1-2.

2 As above.

3 As above.

answer the question whether, given a failure to abate or mitigate the dynamic interplay of the lethal factors prevailing in the state, Nigeria can survive or will break up as similarly situated countries have historically done. A further question is whether, if the probability of fragmentation is high, there are measures to prevent it from occurring.

## **2 *Indicia of instability in Nigeria***

It is necessary to assess each of the indicators to know which, if any, standing alone or in concert with others, has the potential to deal a mortal blow to the continued existence of Nigeria.

### **2.1 Political violence**

Political violence is the use of lethal force or other debilitating means by a person or persons against others. In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, political violence has often occurred in anticipation of, during or sometime after an election campaign. It has been a feature of Nigerian electoral history recorded as early as the pre-independence elections in the 1950s. It is usually intended to eliminate, intimidate, or otherwise subdue political opponents so as to obtain an advantage in the political process. It may have attained its zenith in the early 1960s in the old Western regional elections. The violence in response to the 2011 federal elections, particularly in the northern states, may well be an indication of a resurgence of violence related to the political process in Nigeria. Some Nigerians have described the recent Boko Haram insurgency as primarily politically motivated, though with a religious and ideological colour.

Political violence has never contributed to the stability of the state or government. In fact, it is said to have contributed substantially to the failure of Nigerian's First Republic and the emergence of military politics in the country in 1966. For obvious reasons, it abated significantly during military governance but re-emerged with the inception of partisan politics in 1978. It died down again between 1984 and 1998, although there were allegations of political violence during the latter part of military rule from 1994 to 1998. There has been a visible resurgence since 1999, when the country began its current attempt to move toward democracy. What Chief Justice Musdapher references regarding the current spate of political violence is the fact that, in all estimations, the intensity and frequency of the violence since 1999 – including murder, kidnapping, extortion and communal violence – has reached alarming proportions requiring urgent attention.

### **2.2 Corruption, nepotism and tribalism**

The three closely-related phenomena of corruption, nepotism and tribalism are very deeply rooted in the Nigerian way of life. Corruption

is any conduct, including verbal and non-verbal communication, which tends to compromise the integrity or to blemish the innocence of the parties involved. This definition, no doubt, raises subjective elements of moral, ethical and cultural context.<sup>4</sup> Both nepotism and tribalism are primordial instincts and are corruptive in that they debase or deprecate the high moral and ethical values which sustain competition in society. They debase the very foundations of any merit system and destroy the competitive spirit and, indeed, do not assist the lofty dictates and aspirations of the work ethic.<sup>5</sup>

Nepotism involves acts of favoritism, especially relating to patronage or benevolence by public officials and is directed to various categories of relatives. Such conduct confers advantages, often unmerited, and thereby defeats fair play and denies the competitive rights of similarly situated parties. The public officer's conduct may be said to be monopsonistic and thereby distorts competition, particularly when the beneficiary pays for the benefit. Morally and legally, it is a wrong, because it denies others the right to compete. Applied to employment opportunities, it distorts the labour market and thereby disturbs an otherwise even distribution of labour in the market and interferes with the employment of the right personnel for maximal efficiency and productivity.

A tribe is a cultural or ethnic group or sub-group with prominent, identifiable linguistic and other features, sometimes including prominent biophysical ones. Nigeria is reputed to have at least 250 tribes, with an even larger number of ethnic sub-divisions, and over 500 languages and dialects. Tribalism is conduct, particularly of a public official, in a manner that favours inordinately persons or issues which relate to his tribal affiliation. Tribalism is closely related to nepotism in that their economic, political and social outcomes are similar. Both are discriminatory and, therefore, legally unjustifiable as they debase the idea of equal opportunity.

Chief Justice Musdapher quite succinctly describes how the phenomena of corruption, nepotism and tribalism function side by side, each reinforcing the other with grave dysfunctional outcomes for the country. According to the learned Chief Justice:<sup>6</sup>

Corruption, tribalism and nepotism are essentially inter-twined in that they evoke dysfunctional social, political, economic and organisational outcomes. Our capacity to investigate, arrest, prosecute and convict those found guilty of contravening our laws is evidently weak and compromised; yet no one is held responsible ... If a person is accused of wrongdoing in Nigeria, his kinsmen are quick to relegate his clear transgressions to some kind of conspiracy against one of their own. Corruption and nepotism *are*

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4 The term 'corruption' is defined loosely by the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Officers Act (2004) as conduct which 'includes bribery, and other related offences'.

5 See M Weber *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* trans T Parsons (1930).

6 Musdapher (n 1 above).

supported and encouraged by its benefactors at the expense of all others. When a person occupies a position of authority, he is expected to help his own. The same people that complain about the impropriety of others become even more blatant when their so-called turn comes.

Corruption, nepotism and tribalism – an inseparable trio – have been with the Nigerian political system for a long time. Corruption has reached alarming proportions in recent times, but has earlier antecedents.<sup>7</sup> The military cited corruption among the political elites as one of the primary reasons for the military *coup d'état* of 15 January 1966 that ended Nigeria's First Republic. The eradication of corruption was one of General Yakubu Gowon's stated preconditions for the handover of power to civilian politicians in assuming the position of military head of state.<sup>8</sup> The public policy of trying to curb corruption in the Nigerian system has been sustained since General Gowon's regime. Several years later, Nigerians welcomed the creation of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission in 2000, along with the subsequent establishment of its tribunal. Even so, Nigeria has recently been rated as one of the most highly corrupt nations in the world by Transparency International<sup>9</sup> – an assessment shared by many Nigerians.

### 2.3 Ill-discipline and related crimes

Chief Justice Musdapher mentioned ill-discipline, abductions and kidnappings, armed robbery, murder and extortion as other grave problems facing Nigeria. All of these, except ill-discipline, are prohibited offences under the Nigerian Criminal Code, which has been in existence since 1943. They are also included in the Nigerian Penal Code (for the north) which came into force in 1958. Ill-discipline is often associated with, or a precondition to, lawlessness. Where it is pervasive, as is now the case in Nigeria, particularly as it concerns other criminal conduct, it is an indicator of a flagrant disregard for – or a failure of – the legal order, particularly the penal law. These can result in grave political and security consequences. But the question remains: Can any of these alone, or in concert, threaten the existence of Nigeria? My hunch is to doubt that these alone could. Let us look at some of the others.

### 2.4 Terrorism and insurgency

Since 2010, or thereabouts, terrorist attacks in the form of bombings of religious and other targets has been increasing at an alarming rate. Chief Justice Musdapher made the point strongly in maintaining:<sup>10</sup>

More than ever before in the history of Nigeria, the scourge of terrorism poses great challenges in the Nigerian state. Our slide into anarchy has

7 See Editorial 'Corruption and leadership in 2013' *The Guardian* 7 January 2013.

8 JM Ostheimer *Nigerian politics* (1982) 137.

9 Transparency International *Annual Report, 2012*.

10 Musdapher (n 1 above) 2.

assumed dangerous dimensions, perhaps beyond the capacity of our security agencies to deal with the menace effectively.

Although terrorism is not easily defined, it may be said to be the use of force, usually violent, as a means of coercing a target population to submit to the will of the terrorists. Terrorism is intended to elicit or maximise fear and publicity, making no distinction as to combatants and noncombatants in a conflict.

There is no legally agreed upon definition of the term 'terrorism', but a recent United Nations (UN) document describes it as any 'act which is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act'.<sup>11</sup> The word 'terrorism' is both emotionally and politically laden, particularly as it imports issues of national liberation and self-determination.<sup>12</sup> Terrorism takes many forms, including political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious and ecological issues. The taxonomy of terrorism, including precipitating motivations and considerations, is now a subject of intense study.<sup>13</sup> Whether the Nigerian experience can be reduced to a type may be an interesting subject, but for purposes of this article, the primary concern is the threat of insurgency.<sup>14</sup> Insurgency is one objective of organised terrorism, just as terrorism is one of several strategies of insurgency. Both terrorism and insurgency may be used by states in their internal and foreign policy operations. Terrorism and terrorist tactics constitute part of the strategies and tactics of insurgency. The operational tactics are essentially those of guerilla warfare. The object is to intimidate, frustrate and raise the feeling of uncertainty, imminent danger and the loss of hope, so as to cripple or limit all aspects of human activity and normal livelihoods. Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, MEND and, lately, Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'anati Wal Jihad, are currently international and local Nigerian examples of terrorist networks. Until recently, Nigerian terrorist activity was thought to be motivated by ethnocentric considerations. Currently, there appears to be a pronounced religious content in the character of insurgency in Nigeria. A few of the earlier experiences merit examination here, as a guide in estimating the character, trend and

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11 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Keynote Address, Closing Plenary of the International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security, 'A Global Strategy for Fighting Terrorism' Madrid, Spain, 10 March 2005.

12 CFD Paniagua 'Negotiating terrorism: The negotiation dynamics of four UN counter-terrorism treaties, 1997-2005 PhD thesis, City University of New York, 2008.

13 See the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism annexed to UN General Assembly Resolution 49/60, Measure to Eliminate International Terrorism UN Doc A/Res/69/60, 9 December 1994. See also R Bailey 'Earth liberation front terrorist gets 22 years in prison for anti-biotech arson' *Reason Magazine* <http://reason.com/blog/2009/02/06/earth-liberation-front-terrori> (accessed 31 January 2014).

14 See PP Purpura *Terrorism and homeland security: An introduction* (2007).

intensity of the current campaign, as well as the dynamics and possible consequences.

### 3 History of insurgency in Nigeria

Previous insurgencies in Nigeria have varied in their scope, sophistication and intensity. There have been at least six instances. We need to briefly consider them in turn, based on a rough chronological order.

#### 3.1 Declaration of Niger Delta Republic

The first known insurgency or terrorism attempt in Nigeria may be credited to the movement to liberate the Niger Delta people led by Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro. Major Boro belonged to the Ijaw ethnic extraction in the Niger Delta region and, at the time of his rebellion, was a student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His complaint was against the exploitation of the oil and gas resources of the Niger Delta by both the federal and regional governments in total disregard of the citizens of the area. Boro formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), an armed military group composed of 150 of his kinsmen. He firmly believed that the people of the Niger Delta deserved a more equitable share of the wealth which accrued from oil. To press the point, on 23 February 1966, the NDVF declared the Niger Delta Republic. The Republic lasted only 12 days before the federal military forces crushed the insurgency and arrested Boro. He and his followers were charged, tried and imprisoned for treason. However, on the eve of the Nigeria-Biafra war in July 1967, General Yakubu Gowon granted them amnesty. Boro enlisted in the federal forces in the war against the rebel Biafran forces of Odumegwu Ojukwu. He died a hero at Ogu, near Okrika in Rivers State, having participated in the successful liberation of the Niger Delta from the Biafran forces.<sup>15</sup>

From this episode of Nigerian history, we can identify a number of issues that continue to this day. First, the Niger Delta issue is not forgotten. It continues to be on the front burner in matters of security, insurgency and, indeed, the continued existence of Nigeria. Second, a resurgence of the threat of insurgency will likely re-emerge, either as a response to similar threats elsewhere in Nigeria or where there is a lapse in the policy thrust to remedy the imbalances which caused the insurgency in the first place. This is the background to the emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which we discuss later in this section. Third, it is noteworthy that the causative factors in this insurgency are still very much visible in the entire Niger Delta region, namely, extreme poverty in the midst of

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<sup>15</sup> 'Odumegwu Ojukwu' Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odumegwu\\_Ojukwu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odumegwu_Ojukwu) (accessed 31 January 2014).

extreme affluence, degradation of the human living environment to levels requiring concerted humanitarian intervention, discriminatory public policies resulting in political alienation of the human population, unsustainable extractive economies and, finally, the absence of environmental remediation policies and activities. All these, and maybe more, are likely to fuel discontent and exacerbate future conflicts and insurgent tendencies.

### 3.2 Nigerian civil war

The Nigerian civil war (sometimes called the Nigeria-Biafra War) was fought from 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970. The war followed a *coup d'état* of 15 January 1966, led by military men of the Ibo-speaking ethnic group, and a counter-*coup d'état* of 29 July 1966, led by military men mostly of the Hausa-Fulani-speaking Northern region. A great social upheaval followed these *coups*, including the destruction of lives and property of persons from the southern part of the country, particularly those from Eastern Nigeria. Their kinsmen had been identified as leaders of the first *coup*, which eliminated prominent leaders of the north, including Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, then Prime Minister of Nigeria, and Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, then Premier of Northern Nigeria. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu declared independence from the Nigerian Federation on 27 May 1967, naming the new state the Republic of Biafra. The civil war that ensued was probably the most devastating that the African continent has ever witnessed.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the Nigerian civil war ended more than 42 years ago, there are still some critical, lingering issues and lessons that might be learnt from the war. First, the ethnocentric *cum* religious issues that were part of the driving force towards belligerent insurgency have not only not abated, but there is a visible crescendo in their intensity and complexity. The fraternity which seemed to be the fundamental objective in General Gowon's pronouncement at the end of the war announcing a policy of 'No victor no vanquished' is still to be realised in many respects. Second, more than anything else, the religious gap between the Christians and Muslims in the country is not narrowing. Rather, there has been a rise in the levels of distrust, mutual suspicion and antagonism that might well be making inroads into the political class. It is there that the tragedy may lie. Third, notwithstanding their obvious successes in the professions, commerce, industry and government, the Ibos, who inhabit the major proportion of what was Biafra, do not feel fully integrated into the body politic of Nigeria, and this gives rise to a feeling of marginalisation and alienation. As the Ibo are a major tribe in the Nigerian demographic structure, such feelings could fan the desire to rekindle the Biafran flame with all the

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<sup>16</sup> For good accounts of the Nigerian civil war, see A Madiebo *The Nigerian revolution and the Biafran war* (1980); F Forsyth *The Biafra story* (1969); G Mwekikagile *Ethnic politics in Kenya and Nigeria* (2001).

attendant consequences for security and stability of the polity. Fourth, the primary cause of the Nigeria-Biafra War was ethno-religious hegemony and the problem of the consequential control of economic resources. This factor is still very prominent in Nigerian politics and ethno-religious struggles for supremacy.

A final and related issue we should note in the Biafra saga is the continued insistence of the Ibos that their boundaries remain coterminous with those of the former eastern region of Nigeria, including the present Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Bayelsa States. This may have had a significant impact on the outcome of the civil war. While the minority tribes which constitute those four states – the Ijaws, Ibibios, Ogojas, Efiks and others – insist that they have nothing to do with Biafra, the Ibos insist that they do. This constitutes a serious conflict between the rights of the minorities, on the one hand, and the ambition of the Ibos, on the other. The truth is that, from the onset of the civil war, there has been and still continues to be a deep-seated distrust between the minority tribes and the Ibos, and none of the two sides seems to be making any effort to assuage the other. This situation is a ticking time bomb.

### **3.3 Movement for the actualisation of the sovereign state of Biafra**

More than two decades after the end of the Nigerian civil war, there emerged the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). This movement is led by Mr Ralph Uwazurike, a lawyer by training. This movement has a firm root in the five South-East states of Nigeria that are home to the Ibo people. MASSOB has been reported to be well armed and there have been reported cases of confrontation with the Nigerian police and military forces. MASSOB adopts the Biafran national flag and this can be seen displayed in the South-East political zone of the country. The conspicuous display of the Biafran flag in a territory that would otherwise be Nigerian sovereign territory suggests that a state of Biafra still exists – at least in the minds of the Ibos.

MASSOB is obviously a logical follow-up to the failed activities of the Biafran belligerents. The agony of defeat, coupled with the unsettled issues that continue to bedevil the Nigerian polity, naturally extends the erstwhile belligerent posturing into this new strategy in anticipation of better opportunities to resuscitate full-scale belligerency. MASSOB has so far never claimed responsibility for any terrorist act, nor has anyone been attributed to its activities so far. However, MASSOB has introduced and circulated Biafran currency notes as legal tender. It has also issued passports for citizens of Biafra. MASSOB issued an 'official' statement in 2009, predicting the collapse and disintegration of the Nigerian state by 2013. The statement said that six republics are likely to emerge after the disintegration of Nigeria, namely, Biafra Republic (Ibo East), Arewa Republic (Hausa-

Fulani North) and Oodua Republic (Yoruba West), and three other unnamed republics.

### 3.4 Movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta and related insurgencies

More than 30 years after the demise of Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, there was a resurgence of the armed protest against the federal government and the multi-national companies engaged in the oil industry of the Niger Delta. Most of the armed groups were made up of raggedy, ill-equipped, restive youths, who are spread across the length and breadth of the Delta region. At its inception, this resurgence seemed to be decidedly unfocused as to who the target should be – whether it should focus on the oil companies, the government, or the chieftains and their middlemen as the primary culprits in the perceived scheme of denials of benefits from oil operations and from the associated injuries to the people and their environment.

Initially, therefore, there was great infighting among these armed youths. This came to a head in the late 1990s, as the main communities in Warri, Delta State, went into an all-out armed conflict, one tribe against the other. The war was centred on who should control the oil benefits coming to Warri, a centre of oil production, next in importance only to Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in the West African oil industry. The Ijaws, Itshekiri's and the Urhobos fought a destructive war for the soul of Warri for more than five years, but somehow the realisation that the common enemy was the federal government and its foreign company partners changed the campaign focus from an internecine fratricide to a major campaign against the government. By this time, the restiveness of the youths had spread across the entire Niger Delta and was growing in sophistication.<sup>17</sup> There are allegations that corrupt politicians may have unwittingly aided the process of militarisation of the Niger Delta for personal reasons, unmindful of the consequences of their activities.

Earlier on there had been various movements and activists who opposed the perceived injustice the Niger Delta people were forced to bear by the government and its oil company partners. In most cases, including Umuechem and Ogoni in Rivers State, they were mostly non-violent.<sup>18</sup> However, when Ken Saro-Wiwa, a non-violent environmental activist of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), was executed by the Nigerian government, this

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17 The author was involved in brokering peace in the Warri conflict in Delta and the Okrika-Elleme conflict in Rivers State.

18 See AO Muzan 'Conflicts, disputes and strife in the Niger Delta oil industry: A causal analysis' (1999) 4 *Nigerian Journal of Jurisprudence and Contemporary Issues* 53.

fuelled an insurgency across the Niger Delta.<sup>19</sup> At the height of the Niger Delta insurgency, some of the groups had a very sophisticated arsenal that would have been the boast of any group in the history of guerilla warfare. Among these groups were Ateke Tom's group and Alhaji Mujahed Asari Dokubo's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, both of which spread throughout the entire Niger Delta region. This period also saw the emergence of the group known as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).<sup>20</sup>

MEND considers itself to be an umbrella group, co-ordinating a large number of groups of various sizes and lethal capacity that spread the entire length and breadth of the Niger Delta region, from the creeks of Ondo State in the west, to the mouth of the Cross River in the extreme east of Nigeria's Atlantic coast and up north to the point of primary bifurcation of the river Niger, in that triangular fashion.<sup>21</sup> The tactics used by MEND and its Niger Delta insurgent groups are largely those of guerilla warfare. Using speed boats and highly-sophisticated weapons, they often quickly out-manoeuvre and overrun elite security operatives hired to guard the oil operations in the creeks, swamps and offshore areas. The insurgents completely shut down operational systems, and they also kill, maim and take hostages, demanding large sums of money in foreign currency for their release. There have been reported incidents of bombings attributed to MEND, including the incident in Abuja for which the leader of MEND, Henry Okah, was convicted in South Africa. Based on reported activities beyond the confines of the Niger Delta, MEND seems to have expanded beyond the Niger Delta region to become a virtually nation-wide insurgency.

### 3.5 Oodua People's Congress

The Western states of Nigeria are home to the Yoruba and the the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), a nationalist Yoruba organisation formed in 1997. The founding head of the organisation is Dr Fredrick Fasheun, and its militant aspects are headed by Ganiyu Adams. The organisation came about as a natural outcome of the massive Yoruba protests which followed the death of Chief Mashood Abiola, who was widely regarded as the winner of the later annulled presidential elections of 12 June 1993. Clashes between the OPC and law enforcement agencies, primarily the police, intensified the activity of a dissident group within the OPC, which ultimately broke away to form the Oodua Liberation Movement, sometimes also known by the name Revolutionary Council of Nigeria (RCN). This splinter group became far more militant in its operations. This group opposes Nigeria's

19 The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which was headed by Ken Saro-Wiwa until his death, has continued to be a political, non-violent movement which seeks to address the ills of oil operations in the environment of Ogoni land in Rivers State.

20 MEND may have been a confederation of several groups.

21 See 'Nigeria: Risky toughness' *The Economist* 18 September 2008.

federal system of government and wants the Yoruba to secede from Nigeria and form a sovereign Oodua Republic.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.6 Northern Arewa groups

We now turn to the northern part of the country known as Arewa. Until recently, the north had not seen any sustained terrorist attacks which could be characterised as approaching insurgency. There were, however, violent conflicts in the north in the late 1970s and 1980s. These were violent, intra-religious campaigns between different sects of Islam that resulted in the deaths of several thousand people. The Maitatsine sect led by Sheik Muhammadu Maruwa fought mainstream Muslims who refused to accept its path in Islam. Coincidentally, there were frequent violent and bloody intra-religious clashes between members of Izalatu bidi'at wa Ikamatul Sunna (Izala) and the Tijaniyya Tariqa Quadriyya Tariqah (Tariqah) sects. The Izala, headed by Shiekh Abubakar Muhammadu Gummi, regarded the Tariqah sect as un-Islamic and prevented them from leading Jumat prayers. This prohibition led to violence that erupted.<sup>23</sup>

Aside from the Izala and the Tariqah upheavals, there were hardly any serious conflicts in the north of a major dimension before the current Jos crisis. The Jos crisis involves issues similar to those facing the Warri in Delta State, including control of territory, ethnic hegemony and political, economic, socio-cultural rights. Religion is more prominent in the Jos crisis than it was in the Warri crisis and is crucial to a lasting solution in Jos. The Jos crisis has had a long gestation period and has simmered for a long time. The sudden rupture and intensity of the conflict may not be entirely unconnected with recent changes in the Nigerian legal system, particularly constitutional issues relating to religion, local government and representation in the state and federal legislatures. Jos offers the best example in the north of Nigeria where pre-colonial and colonial history have produced a fusion of ethnicity, religion, politics, law and economics which now produce upheavals that may last for a long time to come. It has been noted that the British colonial administrators put several non-Hausa enclaves under Fulani rule under the emirs during their rule of the north while, at the same time, the *indigenes* of these areas were being converted to Christianity and not

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22 See G Adams 'The Yoruba nation and self-determination' text of a press conference, Lagos, Nigeria, 20 October 1999. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oodua\\_People's\\_Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oodua_People's_Congress) (accessed 23 March 2013). See also 'Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC)' <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/yoruba.htm> (accessed 31 January 2014).

23 OF Ibrahim 'Religion and politics: A view from the north' in L Diamond *et al* (eds) *Transition without end – Nigerian political and civil society under Babangida* (1996) 51-521.

Islam, the religion of the emirs.<sup>24</sup> According to historian Oscar Farouk Ibrahim:<sup>25</sup>

The result was that most of them became Christians. Their journey to Christianity also ensured that they got Western education, and in the context of the modern Nigerian state, that translated to power through holding and state positions. These people now do not understand why some 'foreigners' should come and lord over them in their own land.

Historian Peter Ekeh makes that same point rather emphatically, as follows:<sup>26</sup>

These non-Muslim areas have become the Christian north, one of the remarkable developments in Nigeria's history. But Christian Northern Nigeria carries with it scars of its past wounds inflicted by Fulani slave raids. Christianity in the north has become much more than a mere profession of faith. It is a political statement of freedom from Fulani control.

This 'political statement' is likely to be heard louder and louder as the Christian population grows in the north and the traditional Hausa-Fulani hegemony becomes increasingly challenged.

This realisation may have informed the establishment of the Arewa People's Congress. Even though the name 'Arewa' means 'north', a geographical description, the real focus may be northern elements of Hausa-Fulani extraction. The Arewa People's Congress is a group established in Northern Nigeria in December 1999 to protect the interests of the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria. It was probably established to counter the growing influence in the Western parts of Nigeria of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), which was reported to have been engaging in increasing confrontations with the Hausa-Fulani in the west.<sup>27</sup> Not much is known of the activities of the APC, and one can only speculate regarding the scope of interests of the Hausa-Fulani contemplated by the APC and how it goes about meeting that pronounced objective. However, this is regarded as closely allied with the wider Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), an umbrella socio-cultural body in the north which also includes non-Hausa Fulani elements.<sup>28</sup>

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24 The *indigenes* are the Hausas and other aboriginal tribes (not the Fulani settlers). The Fulani are a primarily migrant or nomadic people who are regarded by the owners of the land as strangers or settlers. Historically, they have taken up permanent settlement only where they have sufficiently subjugated the aboriginals of the land that they settle.

25 As above.

26 P Ekeh 'Political minorities and historicity-dominant minorities in Nigerian history and politics' in O Oyediran (ed) *Governance and development in Nigeria: Essays in honour of Billy J Dudley* (1996) 52.

27 See SI Onimajesin 'The OPC militancy in Nigeria, 1999-2003: Its implication and management' University of Ilorin, <http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/onimajesin.htm> (accessed 31 January 2014).

28 'Arewa People's Congress' Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arewa\\_People's\\_Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arewa_People's_Congress) (accessed 31 January 2014).

### 3.7 Jama'atu Ahlil Sunna Lidawati wal Jihad (Boko Haram)

The latest upheaval in the north is Boko Haram which has, without a doubt, the character of an insurgency. The rise of the Boko Haram (meaning 'Western education is sinful') has brought about heightened tension, anxiety and a sense of insecurity hitherto unknown in any part of Nigeria except the Niger Delta region. The group has probably only existed for about three years. It is based in the northern states of Nigeria and has attacked both the police and military, churches and other places of worship, schools, international agencies, market squares and other highly-public targets. Newspaper estimates place the number of casualties in the wake of the Boko Haram campaign in the hundreds of thousands, with many others maimed or wounded. The group's weaponry includes bombs, arms and ammunitions of various degrees of lethal capacity. The government is probably doing its best to contain the insurgency, but it is very clear that the task of bringing back the peace and tranquillity that once characterised the northern states must be everybody's concern.

### 3.8 Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru)

Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Biladis Sudan, known as Ansaru (meaning 'Vanguards for the protection of Muslims in black Africa'), is a self-proclaimed Islamist Jihadist militant group which is based in the north-eastern parts of Nigeria. It was founded in January 2012, when it broke away from Boko Haram. It is reputed to have a more international focus than Boko Haram. Ansaru's motto is 'Jihad fi Sabilillah', which means 'Struggle for the cause of Allah'. This group is still very new and secretive in its operation. It is alleged to have abducted a Briton and an Italian from Kebi State, a French national from Katsina State and, in February 2013, seven French citizens from Northern Cameroon.<sup>29</sup> These kidnappings are the best known of this group's activities in its barely two-year history. More time will be needed to make conclusions as to whether the group's activities are escalating or de-escalating.

## 4 Causative factors behind insurgency in Nigeria

### 4.1 Land use and proprietary rights

In discussing the rise of discontent and predicting the emergence of the Niger Delta insurgency, the author has asserted that opposing rights or claims to rights of any kind would invariably generate conflict. When parties assert their rights in a competing or boisterous way over a thing or situation, elements of conflict will arise, and if these do not abate in time, such conflicts are likely to mature into

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<sup>29</sup> See H Idris 'Why we abducted French nationals' *Daily Trust* 19 March 2013 7. See also T Badawale 'The rise of ethnic militias, de-legitimisation of the state, and the threat to Nigerian federalism' (2001) 3 *West Africa Review* 1-11.

major confrontations.<sup>30</sup> Conflicting proprietary rights to land invariably degenerate into disputes. Nigeria practises a dual land tenure system, incorporating both customary and statutory land tenure. This implies that the proprietary rights of the various classes of owners, occupiers or tenants must relate to both systems. Customary tenancy is a traditional mode of holding land involving a grant by a landlord to another person, including a group, in consideration of the latter's acknowledgment of the former's title through payment of tributes. The grantor of the land is known as the overlord while the grantee is known as the customary tenant. This customary tenancy is said to be wider than fee simply because it also connotes and retains reversionary interests.<sup>31</sup>

Land tenure and proprietary interests in land are a critical factor in the conflicts raging in the north and elsewhere in Nigeria. The mix of customary rights and statutory rights has made a clear-cut definition of rights a thorny issue all over Nigeria. It is at the root of the Niger Delta insurgency. It is also the basis of such conflicts as those between the Fulani and the Tivs of Benue State, the Fulani and the tribes of Jos and the Plateau State, the Tiv and the Jukun of Taraba State, and many others. Proprietary rights claims were behind the Kano Katin Kwari Market killings of October 1982.<sup>32</sup> In all of these incidents, the Nigerian Land Use Act of 1978 and other statutes now in force in Nigeria have not helped matters.<sup>33</sup> The entire problem of the 'indigene' and 'settler' dichotomy in Plateau State revolves around conflicting land and proprietary rights. The distinction between *indigenes* and settlers that is the basis for the dichotomy is not helped by the lack of judicial decisions and case law that would settle the legal definition and property claims.

Here the issue of customary title is always in dispute between the older customary title owners among the *indigenes* and the more recent 'settlers' whose settlement may have been longstanding, spanning several decades or more. This is the problem with which the *indigenes* have had to contend through the centuries, as have groups elsewhere in Africa.<sup>34</sup> Culturally speaking, and perhaps politically and legally speaking, the Fulani in West Africa claim, rightly or wrongly, a state in the strict Westphalian conception that is coterminous with the entire length and breadth of the sub-region extending from Nouakchott, Mauritania in the west, to Cameroon in the south, and

30 See Muzan (n 18 above) 54-55.

31 See *Oshoddi v Balogun*, 4 West African Court of Appeal (WACA) 7 (1936).

32 These were not sustained conflicts, but they arose from a mix of cultural and religious deferences existing between the indigenous Kano traders and non-*indigenes*, mostly Ibo, traders who had a common claim to market resources in Kano.

33 Eg, the Petroleum Act of 1969 and related oil and gas industry laws, some in force since 1958; see BM Russett 'Inequality and instability: The relations of land tenure to politics' (1964) 16 *World Politics* 442-454.

34 Eg the Maasai of East Africa.

thence toward North Africa, by way of Chad, Niger and Mali.<sup>35</sup> That expanse of an otherwise 'homogeneous' breadth of land defining the conceived or extant state was, they might argue, only disrupted and carved into the present nations of West Africa which, to them, can be regarded as mere provinces of one indivisible 'Fulani State' or homeland. So conceived, grazing rights, shelter rights and a place of abode, even if only temporary on their nomadic march, are regarded by them as a common heritage of all citizens of West Africa. It probably was so even before Count Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismark's conferences at Berlin in 1883 to 1885. It is a complex matter with which Nigerian political thought has had to contend for several decades.

To a considerable extent, this broad and liberal philosophy of statehood and land tenure influenced the colonial Native Land Tenure of Northern Nigeria, which has been regarded as a parent of the Land Use Act of 1978.<sup>36</sup> To the Fulani, the current states of West Africa can be viewed beneficially as provincial demarcations of one indivisible country with patches of foreign language influence. It has never been the tradition or practice of the Fulani to suppress a local language or impose the Fulani language wherever they may find themselves. Rather, as is most eminently demonstrated in the northern states of Nigeria, the Fulani would rather adopt, and masterfully so, the local language of the people they rule.

In the Niger Delta insurgency, the feeling of deprivation of land rights and other proprietary rights is further exacerbated by the impunity that is prevalent in the degradation of land, water and air resources of the people. This point has often been heard from the insurgents and other well-meaning local and international persons.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.2 Growth of social class awareness and desire for equality

Social class awareness and consciousness have the potential for conflict generation. A society where the middle class is small with an equally small or smaller upper class and a robust lower class is prone to dangerous conflict. Such a society is usually characterised by great instability. This is because the lower class looks at the upper class with envy. This feeling is pervasive in many parts of Nigeria. Inequality results in bitterness, and bitterness generates envy and hate. This is true across the entire political spectrum in Nigeria, at the national, state and local levels.

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35 In using the term 'sub-region', I mean to import the newer UN idea of regionalism rather than the older British or French conception of a political, economic, or geographically definable interest. For several decades, the reference to West Africa, *vel non*, simply meant British West Africa or French West Africa or the countries identified with these.

36 See *Abioye v Yakubu* (1991) 5 NWLR (Pt 190) 130 135, *per* Kawu JSC.

37 In 2012, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) submitted a confidential report to the President of Nigeria confirming the need for remediation of Ogoni land.

This expression of bitterness is quite a universal phenomenon for, as Aristotle put it, 'it is the passion for equality which is thus at the root of sedition'.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, when people are satisfied, as is often the case with professionals, they need not be very rich like the upper class. These are the middle class – a population which in every society attains a certain point of social contentment and thus indifference. The critical estimation of the upper class by the lower class is often occasioned by hardship, suffering and the desire to be upwardly mobile.<sup>39</sup> Those who are worst afflicted with this type of feeling are those who have received some education and yet are bereft of a means of income.

The cure and prevention of the conflict that is occasioned by this feeling, Aristotle says, lies in 'the quality of goodness and justice, in the particular form that suits the nature of each constitution'.<sup>40</sup> The theoretical basis and the practical outcomes envisioned by Aristotle apply to all societies and all periods of human history. What Aristotle wrote two and a half millennia ago is applicable in today's world. Indeed, it is inevitable that there is bound to be an upheaval in any unequal social class structure. Indeed, American civilisation, as has been emphasised by President Barack Obama in his recent presidential campaign, is a prime example of how the middle class is the bulwark for the survival of any liberal democracy. Without a robust middle class, there is a breeding ground for revolts, anarchy and revolution.

There is no African nation, let alone Nigeria, which does not have an urn-shaped class structure, meaning a social class structure in which the lower class is bloated, the middle class a mere shoestring and the upper class one big, fat head, figuratively speaking. The middle class in any society is usually the natural medium of effective communication, contact and information transmission between the lower and upper classes. Where this wire of transmission is too thin, fragile or non-existent, a given society is inviting turbulent mass action, a revolution.<sup>41</sup> The Niger Delta, the settler situations in Jos and, perhaps, the Boko Haram movement all evoke issues of inequality in Nigeria. The American political scientist and sociologist James Chowning Davies sums up the situation as follows:<sup>42</sup>

When Jefferson premised the argument in 1776 for independence from British rule with the statement that 'all men are created equal', he was making an assertion about man's nature. Men who have been denied equality have been highly responsive to the demand by their leaders for equality and have made revolutions to get it. Whether the language was Lutheran, Wesleyan Calvinist, Jeffersonian, Rousseauian, or Marxian, the

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38 Land and Native Rights Ordinance 1 of 1916, Cap 105 Law of Nigeria, superseded by the Land Use Act, Cap L5 LFN, 2004.

39 Muzan (n 18 above) 61.

40 See Aristotle *The politics of Aristotle* trans E Barker (1958), 203 204 n 36.

41 For some classical works, see H Arndt *On revolution* (1963); G Simmel *Conflict and the web of group affiliations* trans KH Wolff & R Bendix (1955).

42 JC Davies *When men revolt and why* (1971) 7.

frustrated expectation of equality has been a major factor in all major revolutionary upheavals since Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the Wittenberg church door. Indeed, since long before that.

### 4.3 Discrimination

Discrimination comes in a variety of forms. One example is economic discrimination, which is defined as the systematic exclusion, whether prescriptive or *de facto*, of a person or group from participating in positions or activities of higher economic value, such as employment, trade or profession. Another form is political discrimination, which is defined as a systematic or perceivable pattern of limitations in the form, process, normative or practical outcome of the opportunities of groups to take part in political activities or to attain or keep elite positions of trust.<sup>43</sup>

There is also discrimination in the distribution of political and socio-economic goods to populations or segments of the population of a country. This type of discrimination often results in deprivation of basic infrastructural amenities and diminished opportunities for employment, particularly at the upper echelons of governance and economic activities. Ethnic minorities are often victims of this type of discrimination and it has often led to movements of terrorism and insurgency. This type of discrimination was the primary motive force behind the realignment of the erstwhile warring forces of the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo in Warri, Delta State against the federal government in the Niger Delta insurgency and, according to MEND, the insurgency's primary propellant. In the Niger Delta before the emergence of the insurgency, there was a widespread feeling of deprivation and discrimination, since the evidence showed that the rate of unemployment, the general standards of living and the rate of poverty in the region were clearly disproportionate to other parts of the country and clearly worse than the national average. This was reinforced by the fact that high positions of trust in the oil companies were filled by members of the majority tribes, some of whom were not necessarily more qualified than those who were unemployed.<sup>44</sup>

### 4.4 Poverty

It has been noted elsewhere that 'among several other ills, poverty breeds anger, hatred, envy and conflict'.<sup>45</sup> Poverty is the cause of many of Nigeria's problems. The phenomenon of poverty has been recognised from ancient times. Euripides recognised it in early Greek times.<sup>46</sup> For Engels, the peasant war was the culmination of

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43 Muzan (n 18 above) 71.

44 See P Collier *Oil and inequalities in rural Nigeria* (1981). See also PO Olayiwola *Petroleum and structural change in a developing country: The case of Nigeria* (1984).

45 Muzan (n 18 above) 66. See also L Randell *Political economy of Venezuelan oil* (1987).

46 See Euripides 'Suppliants' in *The tragedies of Euripides in English verse* trans AS Way (1894) 373.

revolutionary trends which shaped much German social history from the seventeenth century forward, such that<sup>47</sup>

[a]lthough local insurrections of peasants can be found in mediaeval times in large numbers, not one general national peasant revolt, least of all Germany, can be observed before the peasant war ... [which came about] ... when the lowest stratum of the population, the one exploited by all the rest, arose, namely, the plebeians and the peasants.

The social conditions of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe are applicable in present-day Nigeria. The same trend has manifested itself in regions as diverse as Asia,<sup>48</sup> Latin America<sup>49</sup> and elsewhere on the European and African<sup>50</sup> continents. But this states a complex phenomenon rather too simplistically. We need to know what we mean by poverty. We need to understand the characteristics of poverty so as to appreciate the causal dynamics between it and the types of conflicts that may result in volatile social eruptions like terrorism and insurgency.

Although poverty is not easily amenable to precise definition, we may assume that it means a lack of command over basic consumption needs, resulting in a situation where a person's basic needs far exceed the available means of meeting them.<sup>51</sup> Basic needs include two components. First, they include the minimum requirements of an individual or family for the procurement of shelter, adequate food, clothing, furniture and other necessary household equipment such as cooking, eating and other utensils. Second, they include essential services provided by government for the community at large, such as sanitation, public transport, safe drinking water, health and educational facilities, employment and participation in the public decision-making processes of the community to which the individual belongs.<sup>52</sup> According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), just as there is relative poverty in comparison to the standard of living of others in the same society, there is also absolute poverty. Basic

47 F Engels *The peasant war in Germany (1850)* (1966) 49; H Arendt *On revolution* (1963).

48 See E Snow *Red star over China* (1968).

49 See DP Bwy 'Dimensions of social conflict in Latin America' in LH Masotti & DR Bowen *Riots and rebellion: Civil violence in the urban community* (1968). See also EW Gude 'Political violence in Venezuela, 1958-1964' *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association* (1967) 72.

50 See C Elliott *Patterns of poverty in the Third World: A study of social and economic stratification* (1973); see also P Collier 'Oil and inequalities in Nigeria' in L Leistritz & BL Ekstrom *Social impact assessment and management* (1986).

51 M Ravallion & B Bidani 'How robust is a poverty profile?' (1994) 8 *The World Bank Economic Review* 75-102. See B Seebohm Rowntree *Poverty: A study of town life* (1901); see also V Thomas 'Spatial differences in poverty: The case of Peru' (1980) 7 *Journal of Development Economics* 85-98; AB Atkinson 'On the measurement of poverty' (1987) 55 *Econometrica* 749-764; J Dollard *et al Frustration and aggression* (1939) (1967). See also L Berkowitz (ed) *Roots of aggression: A re-examination of the frustration-aggression hypothesis* (1968); JC Davies 'Towards a theory of revolution' (1962) 27 *American Sociological Review* 5-19.

52 See CR McConnell *Economics principals, problems and politics* (1982).

needs can be relative as well as absolute.<sup>53</sup> The more basic needs are not met, the more severe will be the level of poverty. This relative severity of poverty has a close correlation with the psychological basis of individual and group relations and conduct. It is this psychological basis of individual and group conduct that dictates, to a large extent, the character of response that defines the nature and the scope of conflicts that result from the social condition of poverty. In other words, the social response to poverty, by an individual or a group, is motivated by psychological factors – and these have long been recognised.<sup>54</sup>

Persistent poverty, particularly in the midst of economic growth and affluence of the upper class, will lead to feelings of frustration among the poor. It will also breed hatred, mistrust and anger. These psychological monsters lead to a loss of faith in the system, alienation and hopelessness.<sup>55</sup> At the stage of hopelessness, there is a progressive, psychological diminution of the value of life, which eventually leads to a point of indifference between life and death. At this point, hostility, antagonistic conduct and indiscriminate aggression manifest rather spontaneously and automatically.<sup>56</sup> Mailafia sums up the situation as follows:<sup>57</sup>

The prevalence of poverty makes it easier for extremist groups to mobilise disenchanted mobs in pursuit of their own political goals. In Northern Nigeria, where over 70 per cent of the population lives under the internationally-defined poverty line, it is easy to see how any demagogue or religious extremist can mobilise the poor and destitute as instruments for his own political goals. There is the added factor of youth unemployment, especially within the growing stratum of university graduates. When people are pushed to the lowest levels of desperation and hopelessness, they can fall easy prey to religious demagogues who offer them a sense of belonging.

From this description and many similar analyses of the Nigerian situation, we can categorically assert that poverty breeds conflict and induces susceptibility to terrorist activity in Nigeria. Poverty is based on the lack of basic needs, and the more this lack persists, the greater the likelihood that a situation of frustration will arise which, if not checked in time, will lead to aggression and revolutionary conduct.

#### 4.5 Unemployment

The national average of unemployment in Nigeria stands at 24 per cent, with an estimated 54 per cent of the youth population

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53 See *Employment, growth and basic needs: A one-world problem: Report of the Director-General of the International Labour Office* (1976).

54 See TR Gurr 'Psychological factors in civil violence' (1968) 20 *World Politics* 254.

55 TR Gurr *Why men rebel* (1970).

56 For some classical treatments of the subject, see, eg, Dollard *et al* (n 51 above); Berkowitz (n 51 above); Davis (n 51 above).

57 O Mailafia 'Conflict and insurgency in Nigeria' *PM News* 26 September 2012.

unemployed.<sup>58</sup> An unemployed person, like a poor person, is usually unhappy. The idleness created by unemployment can lead to antisocial conduct to occupy time. Even if the person is educated and skilled, it can lead to frustration, aggression and serious conflict. In itself, unemployment is, of course, a very potent cause of poverty. This is why employment is a necessary component of a basic needs strategy of development, both as a means and also as an end. The benefits of employment are hardly contestable. Employment yields an output and provides an income to the employed, and it gives the employed person the recognition of being engaged in some occupation worth his while and dignity. Mere employment does not, however, by itself satisfy all the requirements of the mind that would remove the psychological preconditions that lead to social unrest. There needs to be improvements in the quality of employment or conditions of work. Most persons would not consider themselves happily employed if the employment they are engaged in is demoralising, undignified, inconvenient, dangerous to health or to life, or indeed discriminatory as to gender, ethnicity, race, age, religion, and so forth.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.6 Political alienation

Conflict and strife usually result where an individual is denied the freedom to participate in the political decision-making processes of the society. Man, being a political animal, always sees himself as such and as being free to engage in politics, formally or informally. Nonetheless, he may withdraw tactically, strategically or voluntarily for psychological or other reasons where the prevailing conditions are not conducive to his participation in the political process. In this latter circumstance of withdrawal, especially where it is involuntary, he is said to be politically alienated from society. Political alienation of the individual person or of a group or segment of society breeds conflict and unrest. Aristotle described well the contempt that characterises political alienation within political systems of oligarchy and democracy in observing:<sup>60</sup>

Contempt is a cause of faction and of actual attacks upon the government, for instance in oligarchies when those who have no share in the government are more numerous (for they think themselves the strong party), and in democracies when the rich have begun to feel contempt for the disorder and anarchy that prevails.

Political alienation or contempt can be manifested by both the rich and the poor – in some instances, simultaneously.

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58 IBRD *Nigeria, employment and growth study* (2009).

59 See AA Ikein *The impact of oil on a developing country: The case of Nigeria* (1994) 90 169-170; Olayiwola (n 44 above).

60 Aristotle *The Politics* trans H Rackham (1932) 382. See E Burke *Reflections on the revolution in France* (1955).

Situations of this type occur in the petroleum-producing regions and elsewhere in Nigeria. Indeed, the Ogoni situation, at the inception or formative period of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), is a prime example. It is reported that MOSOP was initially, and has in fact continued to be, a mass movement of the Ogoni People of the Niger Delta oil-producing area with a membership consisting of both the elite and the masses of the Ogoni people. Political alienation resulting in this type of unity of purpose and resolve between the rich and the poor becomes more formidable and intractable for any government, since it makes it more difficult for the government to penetrate the movement and possibly break the rank and file. This situation produced the Oodua People's Congress that contributed substantially to the demise of military dictatorship in Nigeria.

Whichever way the government chooses to counter political alienation, one thing is clear: When an idea is *class-neutral*, that is, when it involves both the high and the low alike, particularly in countries like Nigeria where the middle class is both comparatively tiny and rather inconsequential, the dangers of conflict, dispute and revolutionary conduct are usually quite high. A major factor that leads to political alienation is discrimination in which, to use a popular Nigerian adage, 'monkey de work and baboon de chop', meaning that the monkey works and the baboon consumes. The situation presented itself classically in January 2012, when a mass action was organised to protest the petroleum subsidy programme and policy of the federal government. There were indeed clear and palpable signs of cracks – or at least, tremors – in the corridors of government power.

#### **4.7 Religious and ideological discontent**

Both religion and ideology are closely-related concepts in the minds of individuals and social groups. In their pure form, they have universalistic attributes, appealing primarily to the primordial instincts. Thus, such epithets as 'primitive', 'developed', 'civilised', 'traditional' or 'modern' may not in reality be very relevant when used in relation to social groups and their attitudes towards religion and ideology. An ideology, like a religion, is a belief system containing a world view that is accepted as fact or truth by some groups. Ideology and religion are both evaluative, normative and ethical, as well as moral in tone and content. The belief system will largely affect the social processes in the particular society and, indeed, institutions and human relations. Thus, the socialisation and social stratification process or a society's ranking of individual members within the society, including issues of equality which relate to political participation, as well as production, distribution and consumption of wealth, is largely determined by the various and frequently-competing ideologies within a given society. For instance, it is asserted by no less an authority than Engels that the clergy were the 'representatives of the ideology of mediaeval

feudalism', such that the religious precepts and attitudes of the day could not help but sustain the socio-political and economic practices of the period.

In the oil-producing areas of Nigeria we may perceive the same competition between religious and ideological forces as manifest elsewhere in the Nigerian state. Apart from Christianity and Islam, numerous other religions are practised in Nigeria, and these, as would be expected, permeate the prevailing ideological types which compete in the country with various degrees of fervour and levels of followership. Conflict is bound to arise in the ensuing competition between religious and ideological types and their adherents. Thus, for example, in a community where the elders adhere to traditions and religious practices of the ancestors, any deviation by the youth from the norms prescribed by the community is likely to be a cause of conflict. The elders frequently insist on preserving their traditional institutions, while the youth, distrusting the 'old' beliefs, want to do things differently. The contention might revolve around the appropriate approach to the resolution of an emergent conflict between the community and an outsider – for instance, a multinational oil company or a government agency. The entire dynamic is propelled by the innate qualities of religious symbolism, particularly its *multivalence* and capacity to reveal a perspective that can integrate diverse realities into a system. We may be quick to add that ideology – almost invariably, but certainly impliedly – benefits from this character of religion. This may be why both ideas always function side by side. In the Arab world, for instance, the ideology of nationalism has been closely identified with Islam.<sup>61</sup> That is, the dominant religion is viewed as one and the same thing as the state, much as the Protestant ethic was said to be inseparable from public organisation and capitalism.<sup>62</sup> The same applies to Judaism and the state of Israel,<sup>63</sup> and numerous other examples. Without a stretch of the imagination, we may conclude that in a system with a multiplicity of religious experiences and *a priori* ideological leanings, there is bound to be serious conflict, particularly where the religious ideas and experiences are fundamentally different or contradictory.

Nigeria is a prime example in this type of conflict setting and the results have been typical. It is expected, for instance, that the more Christianity grows in the north, the greater the tension between the two dominant religious, both competing for supremacy or hegemony. Nonetheless, while the two most conspicuous and competing religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam, the country houses

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61 See M Berger *The Arab world today* (1961) 20. See also M Halpern *The politics of social change in the Middle East and North Africa* (1963).

62 M Weber 'Bureaucracy' in *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* trans HH Gerth & C Wright Mills (1985) 245.

63 See eg B Reigeh 'Israel' in TY Ishmael (ed) *Governments and politics of the contemporary Middle East* (1970) 251-282. See also Halpern (n 61 above).

many other forms of religious experience.<sup>64</sup> The range of religious and ideological pluralism inevitably propagates complex conflicts. In a community in which elders adhere to the normative traditions of their ancestors, which may include elements of ancestral deification or paganism, any deviation from such norms by the youth and others acting under the influence of 'alien' ideals would usually be regarded as antagonistic to the established norms and order. The emerging conflict in such situations is usually profound and at times paradoxical. The conservative approach of the elders is viewed as benign negligence, even irresponsibility, especially in the face of problems that require urgent solutions, such as adopting appropriate strategies to determine proprietary rights, compensation and environmental remediation. The resulting conflict usually tends in the long run to deprive the community of the aggregate benefits which could have otherwise accrued to it. As Gurr puts it, 'religious cleavages are a chronic source of deprivation-inducing conflict'.<sup>65</sup> Gurr's theory is quite applicable at the macro-economic levels, particularly in the insurgency that is now playing out in the Niger Delta and northern parts of Nigeria.

In light of the above, it would be rather surprising to conclude that the mediating role of the chief priest and the shrine, or at least their proximity to the events of 24 May 1995 at Gioko in Ogoni land in the conflict between the Ogonis and the oil giant Shell, was fortuitous. In the Ogoni agitation that led to the mob action that resulted in the killing of prominent personalities of the Ogoni land (the oil-rich ethnic group which had a long history of violent protests against the dominant oil company there, namely, the Shell Petroleum Development Company), the chief priest of the ethnic group's deity was reported to have played a significant role by protecting in the deity's shrine certain of the prominent persons who were otherwise targeted for elimination for allegedly collaborating with the oil companies and the state. The incident occurred on 24 May 1995. This protective custody by the chief priest saved some of the targeted persons who would otherwise have been slaughtered.

Likewise, in Bayelsa and Delta States, two of the prominent oil-producing states of the Niger Delta region, a prominent deity called Egbesu is worshipped by believers (or cult members, some would say), mostly of the Izon (also called Ijaw tribe) was frequently used as a rallying point for intense and destructive protests against the state. It would be hardly surprising not to hear the crescendo of Egbesu religious chants and choruses during the effulgence of Izon nationalistic fervour and protests against the perceived ills perpetrated by the state and the oil operators in Izon land of the Niger Delta. In these cases, as has been evidenced elsewhere, religion was used not

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64 See GT Stride & C Ifeka *Peoples and empires of West Africa* (1971) 321-345.

65 TR Gurr 'A causal model of civil strife: A comparative analysis using new indices' (1968) 62 *American Political Science Review* 1110.

as an opiate, but rather as a motivation toward self-determination and nationalistic mobilisation, in this case, a fragmental variant that may be termed sub-state nationalism, a prominent example of political ideology.<sup>66</sup>

## 5 Conclusion: Nigeria beyond the brink

When it comes to the problems of corruption, nepotism, bribery, murders, kidnapping, indiscipline and the like, we can conclude that, as much as these vices constitute a grave and present danger to the rapid development of a peaceful and great nation, none of them individually or even collectively can break up the country. However, we find that, with the rapidly-growing problem of terrorism associated with insurgency, the country is in grave danger of becoming a failed state and thereby disintegrating.

Historically, insurgency in Nigeria has been localised or regionally based. However, if the present trend toward growing insurgency is allowed to continue unfettered, the regional basis of the scourge will become blurred with time and unpredictable in its potential to destroy the nation. The Nigeria-Biafra civil war was confined to the former eastern region, except for a very brief spill into parts of Delta and Edo States and the eastern periphery of current Ondo State. The Ogoni (MOSOP) upheaval has always been confined to the four local government areas of Rivers State. The war for Warri was localised in the Warri area of Delta State. The MASSOB insurgency still claims the original boundaries of the former eastern region, but it is effectively localised in the current South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, containing Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, which are home to the Ibo people. The OPC insurgency is also localised in the Yoruba-speaking Western states of Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun and Ekiti. The Jos crisis is localised in the Jos metropolis and local government areas contiguous to it and parts of Plateau State. The MEND groups were originally localised in the Niger Delta region but, as has been indicated earlier, there has since been visible evidence of its operations in the Abuja area, Lagos and off-shore.

The current Boko Haram and Ansaru insurgencies are localised in parts of the northern states, but they seem to have the potential of spreading to other parts of the sprawling territory of the north which would be a significant spread of that insurgency. Depending on the public policy response these groups, individually or collectively, have the potential to spread beyond their region or locale of operations. It will be an unfortunate day for Nigeria if all four (Boko, MEND, OPC, MASSOB) major groups are allowed to have a nationwide spread at

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<sup>66</sup> See R Bendix 'The age of ideology: Persistence and changing' in DE Apter *Ideology and discontent* (1964) 294 ff. See also SP Huntington 'Conservation as an ideology' (1957) 51 *American Political Science Review* 454.

the same time because of a wrong, inadequate, ill-informed, ill-timed or superfluous policy response from the authorities.

As far as causative factors are concerned, we can safely conclude that, for Nigeria, there is sufficient potential for full-blown, nationwide terrorism and insurgency, since all causative factors, and possibly more, are eminently represented in the polity. These causative factors, particularly ethnicity, are common to all previous and current insurgent campaigns, except for religion, which is pronounced as a factor only in the Boko Haram and Ansaru insurgencies. There are other causative factors which could not be discussed in the article because of space constraints. These include the gap between the elite and the masses; unfulfilled political and economic promises; income disparity; availability and use of information and communication technology; proliferation of arms; and others which are common to all the insurgent groups in Nigeria.

The presence of a religious element in an insurgency usually has significant implications for policy response. First, such causes are easily sustainable so long as there are adherents to that religion, and particularly if there are new converts. If religion is a way of life and the insurgency is sympathetic to sustaining that way of life, then the insurgency itself is easily sustainable. If an insurgency is easily sustainable because of a belief system, then the basket of policy responses to the insurgency must go beyond the ordinary ones used to address the non-religious causative factors. There must be a special appeal to religious elements, such as peace and peaceful coexistence, a common heritage or fraternity and dialogue and diplomacy. Force, particularly military force, may miss the point as many historical examples outside Nigeria have seemed to indicate.

The most delicate of all the insurgencies currently active or simmering in Nigeria is the Niger Delta (MEND) insurgency. First, it embodies delicate economic implications for the survival of the nation as one entity. Second, if there should be a full-blown insurgency in Nigeria, involving all of the four previously mentioned groups in a free-for-all campaign, the main theatre will likely be the Niger Delta. The economic costs of this hopefully avoidable scenario would be catastrophic. None of the three regions – east, north or west – would like to see a disintegrated Nigeria without its controlling at least a significant portion of the Niger Delta oil. As a matter of fact, for all intents and purposes, what holds Nigeria together for now is the continued existence of oil and gas in the Niger Delta. None of the regions wants another to break away with control over the Niger Delta, and none would want to break away alone without it. In particular, neither the Ibos in the east nor the Hausa-Fulani in the north want to be the land-locked countries; offspring of a disintegrated Nigeria. And we have seen, the level of suspicion between the north and the south regions captured well in the description of retired Chief Justice Musdapher. Thus, we may say that the Niger Delta oil is what holds Nigeria together.

The primary implication for policy of the foregoing analysis is that answering questions related to regionalism of insurgent movements in Nigeria may assist the design of public policy response to ethno-religious relations and security implications and responses to insurgency in Nigeria. Insurgency in Nigeria based on ethno-religious factors will require extra attention, as it might be one of the most potentially devastating. This is based on a number of estimations. First, the growth and dynamism of Islam and Christianity, the two major competing religions in Nigeria, is astounding, particularly in the north. This growth of both religions in the northern states could lead to an outright inter-religious conflict, which might complicate an already complex situation. In the above context and, indeed, in government responses to insurgency in Nigeria, more generally, the legal, constitutional and regulatory mechanisms required for the management of conflict should be overhauled.

Second, in the current insurgency that is associated with Boko Haram and Ansaru in the northern states, one of the problems in designing a response and negotiation strategy for conflict resolution is the lack of a clear statement of the objectives of the group. For example, does Boko Haram want a theocracy for Nigeria? Does it want all Nigerians to adopt Islam as their religion? How does it want to coexist with other religious groups in Nigeria? Should all secular educational systems in Nigeria be scrapped, including universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics and secondary schools? If there were a clearer articulation of the group's objectives, it would be easier to design a policy response that could focus on ending the conflict peacefully and designing policies to move forward.

Finally, there are two factors that are likely to be issues in Nigerian politics for a long time to come. These are ethno-religiosity of polities and income disparities, both of which, as we have seen, are fuels for revolution. To address religious conflicts, in particular, provision should be made for the establishment of a body with constitutional powers composed of the top religious leaders of each of the competing religions in Nigeria and top politicians like state governors. The body should be chaired by a nominee of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria or the Vice-President. Such a body could be named the National Supreme Council on Religion. This body would be responsible for deciding all matters of an interreligious nature that may potentially instigate or breed conflict that might result in insurgency. The implementation of these recommendations would go a long way toward avoiding the cataclysmic projections of Chief Justice Musdapher.<sup>67</sup>

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67 Musdapher (n 1 above).