



POLITICAL AMORALITY AND KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM IN NIGERIA: UNDERSTANDING THE INTRICACIES

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Abstract:

Political amorality and kidnapping for ransom are inextricably linked. The understanding of these linkages is important, in order to correct policy misconceptions as well as reveal the inherent power(s) in political values that are development driven. With the high rate of kidnapping for ransom and the failure of government institutions to provide the human good to its citizens, strict adherence to the tenets of the various political values could help in addressing this problem. This paper evaluates the intricacies surrounding political amorality and its place in bringing about kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. Functionalism theory was adopted. Indeed, it has often been reiterated that if Nigerians live by the ethics and doctrines of the political system, several societal problems would be averted and a holistic sustainable development would be a reality. The paper suggested that Nigeria needs a political revolution of some sort in order to help solve the developmental impasse of the country. Also, Nigerians should engage public officer holder. This is because a people that do not engage their leadership would not receive the best of leadership, constantly engaging public office holders and constructively questioning policies and actions would improve the nation.

Keywords: intricacies, kidnapping for ransom, Nigeria, political amorality, understanding

1. Introduction

Globally, kidnapping for ransom has become a topical issue among scholars, politicians, policy makers and the citizens. The reason is not farfetched; this is because kidnapping for ransom has become a nightmare and is fast gaining notoriety. For instance, Mexico suffered an estimated 105,682 kidnappings in 2012 (U.S Department of State, 2014). In 2013, Mexico officially recorded 1,698 kidnappings, the highest number on record

(*Washington Post*, 2014). That same year, Marian's Organization Association tallied kidnappings in Mexico at 3,038.

In Nigeria, no month passes without cases of kidnapping in the country. Sadly, the rate of kidnapping has risen considerably in the last ten years and it is estimated that no less than 1,500 people are kidnapped on an annual basis in the country thus making kidnapping more or less a new "cottage industry". Between 2008 and 2010, the Nigeria Police Force recorded 887 cases of kidnapping and abduction across the country (Action on Armed Violence, 2013). Kidnapping for ransom is taking place everywhere in Nigeria; it is a national problem that has eaten so deep into the fabric of the country (Dodo, 2010).

Literarily, the word "kidnapping", which has become notorious, putrid and nauseating in the ears of virtually everyone is derived from "kid" meaning; child and "nab" which means; to snatch (Ngwama, 2014). Walsh and Adrian (1983) noted that, kidnapping varies from country to country; therefore, the term is uncertain and devoid of any straight jacket definition. That is, it depends on who is defining it and from what perspective and for what purpose. In the words of Asuquo (2009), the term "kidnapping" is difficult to define with precision, because it varies from State to State and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It is the forceful seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common law offence and the key part is that, it is an unwanted act on the part of the victim. It is a restriction of someone else's liberty which violates the provision of freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from. For this reason, Siegel (2002) sees it as a serious offence. Abraham (2010) defined kidnapping as an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud.

It includes snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreement among people. Walsh and Adrian (1983) viewed kidnapping as unlawful seizure and detention of a person by force against their will. According to them, it an act of seizing a person and taking him/her to another country for involuntary servitude or the impressments of males into military or naval service by force or fraud. They further cited the view of Robertson (1968), who saw kidnapping as a crime of seizing, confining, abducting or carrying away of persons by force or fraud often subjecting him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom or in furtherance of another crime.

Thomas and Nta (2009) defined kidnapping as robbery of the highest rank. According to them, it is an organized and systematic robbery which is not as deadly as armed-robbery, but more profitable than the former. The profitability has encouraged those that indulged in it to carry on with the act although there is a law prohibiting it. In criminal law, kidnapping is defined as taking away of a person by force, threat or deceit with intent to cause him/her to be detained against his or her will (Asuquo, 2009). Whereas Nwaorah (2009) viewed kidnapping as an act of an angry man who wants to

take any person of value hostage, and who could be rescued by loved ones. In most cases, victims are often released after payment of ransom.

According to Ogabido (2009), “kidnapping” means to abduct, capture, carry off, remove or steal away a person(s). For Ajah, Nwokeoma and Okpan (2017), kidnapping is the seizing and holding of someone prisoner illegally, usually demanding for a ransom for his/her release. Finally, Dode (2007) saw kidnapping as a process of forcefully abducting a person or group of persons perceived to be the reasons behind the injustice suffered by another group. It is “a low-cost, high-yield terror tactics”. This was the initial case in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

2. Origin of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria

In Nigeria, kidnapping for ransom started in the Niger Delta Region in 2005. Initially it was used by the Niger Delta militants, to make a case for the development of the region. However, it became worsened by accumulation politics which is the tendency for the ruling class to engage in endless accumulation of natural resources and rents accruing from the region, in the face of deliberate acts of marginalization and deprivation of the people (Akpan, 2010).

At the initial stage, they were not asking for ransom. But later on militants, hoodlums and criminals hijacked it and started kidnapping for a ransom (Thom-Otunya, 2010). One of the foremost recorded cases of kidnapping was when the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, (MEND) Kidnapped nine (9) foreign workers in Delta State to bargain for the release of detained Mujahid Asari Dokubo, Leader of the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force, (NDPYF) and the arrowhead of the Niger Delta Struggle, for a fair deal in this cycle. They did not ask for ransom, only that their leader should be released in exchange for the hostages. The federal government dangled irresistible carrot- money (hard Currency), the boys could not resist it, and so they took the money and released the hostages (Thom-Otunya, 2010).

Initially, expatriate oil workers and a few of their unfortunate indigenous colleagues were the targets. But within the '18 months that Dokubo languished in the State Security Service, (SSS's) Underground gulag at Abuja, kidnapping for ransom not only prospered, it gained considerable leverage and displaced armed robbery as the highest paying crime in the Niger Delta. In addition, after the April elections, kidnapping for ransom became a business tool to settle grievances by groups who felt short-changed by politicians they worked for (Thom-Otunya, 2010).

Today, it is spreading like wildfire in Nigeria. The pervasive insecurity created by kidnapping for ransom is a key manifestation of the breach of social contract by the Nigeria government and a consequent manifestation of frustration aggressions depositions amongst the people. Nigeria is drifting towards the Hobbesian social contract where citizens opt out of the social contract due to one party (the state) increasingly failing to keep its own side of the bargain. So prevalent has the incidence of

kidnapping become in Nigeria that at the 18th African Reinsurance Forum held in Balaclava, Mauritius in October 2012 the African Insurance Organisation (AIO) had disclosed that Nigeria accounted for a quarter of kidnap for ransom cases reported worldwide in the preceding one year, and that the country had been designated as the global capital for kidnap for ransom due to the huge record of kidnap cases reported in the country yearly.

In the report, AIO stated thus, *“The number of kidnaps for ransom in Africa continued to increase. In the first half of 2011, Africa’s proportion of the global total increased from 23% in 2010 to 34%. Nigeria is now the kidnap for ransom capital of the world, accounting for a quarter of globally reported cases”*. The above report depicts how kidnapping for ransom has plagued the development of the country.

3. The Conceptual Overview of Political Amorality

Politics is determined by moral concerns and moral behaviours. According to UKEssays (2017), political morality forms a central position in the functioning of the government. Under normal circumstances, it is the role of the government to ensure a just society where order and harmony exist. As a result, the government has to establish and enforce ethical and moral standards so as to ensure that the society functions well. Decision making is the government’s chief role. Therefore, it must make moral considerations in order to make decisions that are in line with the welfare of the society. Indeed, political morality provides deeper considerations in order for the government to ensure that ethical standards are adhered to, ethics and aspects of morality are entrenched into the law. This makes it conveniently possible to enforce ethical standards and ensure that all people conform to the law.

Ironically, Nigeria is characterized by political amorality. This is because political leaders who are selfless, accountable, loyal, patriotic, sincere, truthful and people-focused have been proved to be a desideratum over the years, more especially under the various administrations that have existed since independence. For example, kickbacks exacted by government officials on approved projects have caused many of these projects to get abandoned by the poor contractors due to insufficient funds because chunks of the money allotted for such projects have gone into the hands of the officials as kickbacks. Mostly, the situation has further deteriorated due to involvement of close relatives or family members in their amoral practices. In other words, family members’ account and private companies are now being used as instruments to siphon the nation’s resources into private pockets.

With a particular emphasis on corruption, Ogebidi (2012) observed that corruption has been the bane of Nigeria’s development. Thus, without mincing words the phenomenon has ravaged the country and destroyed most of what is held as cherished national values. Unfortunately, the political class saddled with the responsibility of directing the affairs of the country have been the major culprit in perpetrating this act. Regrettably, a notable surviving legacy of the successive political

leadership both civilian and military that have managed the affairs of the country at different times has been the institutionalization of amorality in all agencies of the public service, which, like a deadly virus, has subsequently spread to the private sector of the country.

A central question is how ordinary citizens can be, paradoxically, active participants in the social reproduction of this anomaly even as they are also its primary victims and its principal critics? The reason is that political amorality has become imperatively a surviving strategy. Other scholars have offered analyses that contribute to explaining why ordinary Africans participate in political amorality that can be inimical to their own interests. For example, in his book on politics in Nigeria, Joseph (1987) emphasizes the importance of various kinds of vertically organized solidarity networks in Nigerians' relationship to the state, and argues that corruption hinges partly on the inseparability of individual and collective interests: "the fundamental social process in Nigeria is one in which these two propositions – (a) I want to get ahead and prosper and (b) my group (ethnic, regional, linguistic) must get ahead and prosper – cannot logically be separated, whether in the context of behavior, action, or consciousness". Smith (2010) captures concisely the significance of such solidarity networks by citing what the label as an African proverb: 'whoever does not rob the state robs his kith and kin' One of the most important contributions of Africanist political science and the emergent anthropology of corruption has been explaining how so-called political amorality frequently occurs as the result of social strategies, cultural logics, and moral economies that assign values different from those assumed in the ideologies of the neoliberal bureaucratic state (Bayart, 1993).

4. Political Amorality and Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria

Political amorality and kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria is linked to each other, causing undue arousal or doom among the people. It impedes growth and also erodes the already established value systems in Nigeria. In the light of the above, political leaders hardly pursue the goals of the state but their own personal and sectional interest. To exemplify this, is a statement credited to former President Goodluck Jonathan that the dreaded Islamic fundamentalist group 'Boko Haram' has infiltrated his government. This bewildering statement is an indication that some cabinet members are there to pursue interest antithetical to that of the nation, thus, in these circumstances the issue of leadership and good governance remains a mirage. The materialistic thesis and perception of the state in Nigeria and its institution is a hydra headed problem that has robbed the society of its leadership and governance essences. The state in Nigeria is seen as an avenue of primitive wealth accumulation. This notion and virus has affected the conduct of government business and regrettably has crept into the whole society. Banfield (in Osaghae, 1994) argued that the only reason people in this kind of society seek public office is to pursue their material gain and in the process neglect public wellbeing and interest.

Nevertheless, the bulk of the mess is reflective of the disturbing rising state of kidnapping for ransom; this is also because the government has seemingly lost focus on the importance of quality education and provision of basic amenities for an average Nigerian. The reluctance of the lawmakers to put forth a strong and constructive debate in order to come up with good idea or programme so as to save the situation remains a mystery. Hence, chunks of unemployable Nigerians who go into kidnapping for ransom. Therefore, kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, more especially under the prevailing political condition, is a premonition more especially where the future of the country is concerned.

Strikingly, history has shown that no nation of the world grew and enjoyed steady development in virtually all spheres of its national life without experiencing good and selfless political leadership. This is largely because qualitative growth and development has always been an outcome of good governance. Commenting on the experience of the Nigerian nation, the renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe, insisted that the root cause of the Nigerian predicament should be laid squarely at the foot of bad leadership. Achebe argued, is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership (Achebe, 1984: 1).

Surely, leadership holds the key to unlocking the transformation question in Nigeria, but to sustain this drive, leaders must carry certain genes and attributes that are representative and primitive of this order. These include: (i) The existence of practical, purposeful, visionary and missionary initiative by the individual, reflecting the objectives of held ideas, values and aspirations, (ii). The existence in an individual of a clear set of ideas, values, aspirations reflecting those of the majority who are the subject or followership, and (iii). The existence of patriotic and nationalistic spirit, transparency and accountability, signs of concrete achievements involving the extent to which intended effects are produced by the leader. These are the core values of good governance.

5. Theoretical Prediction: The Functionalism Theory

Functionalism is a theory in political science that arose during the inter-War period principally from the strong concern about the obsolescence of the State as a form of social organization. Rather than the self-interest of [nation-states](#) that [realists](#) see as a motivating factor, functionalists focus on common interests and needs shared by states (but also by non-state actors) in a process of global integration triggered by the erosion of state sovereignty and the increasing weight of knowledge and hence of scientists and experts in the process of policy-making (Rosamond, 2000). Its roots can be traced back to the liberal/idealist tradition that started with [Kant](#) and goes as far as [Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points"](#) speech (Rosamond, 2000).

Indeed, functionalism argued that international [integration](#) – the collective governance and 'material interdependence' (Mitrany, 1966) between states – develops its own internal dynamic as states integrate in limited functional, technical, and/or economic areas. International agencies would meet human needs, aided by knowledge and expertise. The benefits rendered by the functional agencies would attract the loyalty of the populations and stimulate their participation and expand the area of integration. Below are strong assumptions underpinning functionalism: (1) That the process of integration takes place within a framework of human freedom. (2) That knowledge and expertise are currently available to meet the needs for which the functional agencies are built. (3) That states will not sabotage the process.

In this context, government's failure to protect the fundamental human dignity and other set goals triggers off, among individuals, behaviour which ran contrary to social order and social justice hence the rising incidence of kidnapping for ransom. Also, given the fact that the regulatory system is weak and inefficient, it creates room for kidnapping for ransom to be exhibited.

6. Conclusion

There is no doubt that political amorality disconnects from core social values. The burden of oppression, impunity and intimidating image laundering by individuals with ill-gotten wealth in the society are luring the vulnerable Nigerian into becoming 'desperados' who would rather have money at all cost. More unfortunate is the role being played by the 21st century parents who would rather give their children unhealthy orientation and expose them to unrealistic lifestyles. The orientation their own parents never gave them, all in the name of 'my child must not suffer what I suffered.' Many of the things children are exposed to nowadays are not sustainable in futuristic terms, hence these children would grow up craving for what they could not afford and, of course eventually get their fingers burnt when they become desperate.

Urgently, Nigeria needs a political revolution of some sort in order to help solve the developmental impasse of the country. Also, Nigerians should engage public officer holder. This is because a people that do not engage their leadership would not receive the best of leadership, constantly engaging public office holders and constructively questioning policies and actions would improve the nation. Finally, Nigerians should imbibe a sense of patriotism. Every Nigerian should treat Nigeria as a personal property, with this attachment of value, Nigerians would be interested in seeing the country succeed and not merely caught up in their personal pursuits, this would be the first step towards bringing about a very great Nation.

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