

Corruption-Drug Trafficking-Terrorism Nexus: Understanding West African Security-Development Quandary Beyond European Inferiority Propaganda

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Abstract

This study examines the West African security-development quandary and raises a poser as to whether this quandary is a practical validation of the European colonial propaganda and theoretical conception of Africans as inferior people. For epistemic answers, the study identifies corruption-drug trafficking-terrorism nexus as more reasonable explanation of human security and sustainable development predicament in postcolonial West Africa. Arising from a thorough interrogation of the trends, nuances and shapes of this nexus, the study concludes that the European conception of Africans as inferior is untrue and baseless as Africans have always been fully human with capacity for effective social organisation and robust governance. However, the most ingenious solution to the problems of insecurity and underdevelopment in West Africa is to frontally break the nexus by functionally and structurally addressing the problems of corruption and drug trafficking as a means to ultimately reduce the spate of terrorism in the sub-region.

Key words: Conflict; Security; Development; Corruption; Terrorism

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INTRODUCTION

On the basis of obvious realities and copious evidence derivable from keen observations as well as intellectual discourses on post-colonial developments in West Africa, it can be summarily averred that the events in greater number of countries in the sub-region are synonymous with conflict and underdevelopment. In fact, many West African countries have been enmeshed in the whirlpool of violent conflicts since their attainment of independence such that they have grown to attain the unpleasant fame of being theatres of civil wars, military coup d'état, and ethno-religious conflicts. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Niger, Benin, and (recently) Burkina Faso and Mali readily suffice as examples. Kuerschner (2013) describes it thus; "The history of West Africa is a series of conflicts: Most of the states have seen civil wars..., coups d'état... as well as ethnic and religious clashes...since gaining independence". The spate of civil wars and other forms of internal convulsions has posed terrible challenge to security, peace and development in the sub-region, thus rendering the cohabitation of insecurity and quest for development as mere red herring and a labyrinth in the sub-region's direction for collective progress. It has also turned "the dreams of an economically integrated and politically united West Africa into a living nightmare for most of its citizens" (Adebajo 2002, p.39), and provoked large-scale destruction of life and properties as well as caused untold hardship in terms of humanitarian crises (internal displacement of people and refugee issues), uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons, illiteracy, poverty and disease, trans-border trafficking in humans and illicit drugs, unauthorized exploitation of natural resources, kidnapping and banditry (Afolabi, 2009, p.25)

In this context, Omeje (n.d.) offers an illuminating view that "The history of post-independence West Africa, especially the past two decades, has been blighted

by virulent conflicts. These conflicts are of varying dimensions, durations, scales and intensities. Conflict triggers and catalysts are also multi-dimensional, ranging from historical animosities and colonial legacies, to factors rooted in the complexity of post-colonial realities, forces of globalisation and global governance, external agencies and the vagaries of the ecological system". He adds that "Conflicts in West Africa are not different in kind, but arguably in degree, from conflicts in the wider sub-Saharan Africa and probably the entire continent". Yet, he admits that, it is difficult to categorise or typify conflicts in West due to "multi-causal, multi-dimensional and inter-connected nature of most conflicts". In a related sense, (Afisi, 2009, pp.59-66) argues that, "Although conflicts are not always violent, those that have plagued West Africa at community, state and regional levels have been characterized by violence".

However, while it is often fanciful to blame post-colonial challenges of nation building in Africa on colonial rule, it is also proper to probe into the internal dynamics of conflict in Africa so as to appraise how Africans have fared among themselves after colonial rule. This is to establish a more balanced nuance and paradigm for understanding the contours and nuances of conflict in West Africa. To do this, the present study notes the views of scholars of the primordialist school, a largely Western paradigm, whose main argument is that conflict in Africa is an inevitable and/or an ancestral tendency rooted in the underlying phenomenal features and differences among the 'heterogeneous' collections of multi-cultural ethnic groups arbitrarily forced together under the guise of colonial administrative reforms and boundary adjustments to form sovereign nations. In fact, some of these scholars argue that the seemingly unstoppable trends of violent conflicts in Africa generally are a product of the unfettered warrior spirit, inclinations and mental configurations of pre-colonial African potentates who had insatiable proclivities characterised by the patrimonial tendency for political mobilisation and competition to strengthen underlying primordial features. This reality, they argue, makes violent wars and conflicts become apparently predictable, pervasive and contagious (Esman, 1994; Hastings, 1997; Llobera, 1999).

It is a truism that most of the destructive civil wars have ended through well calibrated peace treaties. For instance, between 13th and 15th January, 1970 in Nigeria, Colonel Phillip Effiong who took charge following the abdication of Colonel Ojukwu as leader of the Biafran troops, concluded the armistice with General Yakubu Gowon. After this deal, Gowon (1970; Kirk-Greene, 1971, pp.457-461) remarked that; "The tragic chapter of violence is just ended. We are at the dawn of national reconciliation. Once again, we have an opportunity to build a new nation. My dear compatriots, we must pay homage to the fallen heroes who have made the supreme

sacrifice that we may be able to build a nation, great in justice, fair trade, and industry". However, it goes without saying that the civil wars, while they lasted, signified palpable insecurity and absence of peace, implying that their end should naturally usher in peace and security as necessary conditions for development.

Yet, there has, in recent times, emerged a new trend of anti-development scourge of insecurity, which has manifested mainly in acts of terrorism. As Annan (2014, p.1) observes, "while violent conflicts are declining in the sub-region, recent insurgencies in the Sahel region affecting the West African countries of Mali, Niger and Mauritania and low intensity conflicts surging within notably stable countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal sends (sic) alarming signals of the possible re-surfacing of internal and regional violent conflicts". Of course, terrorism was alien to the entire African continent until recently. The reality now is that a substantial part of West Africa and the Maghrebian tip of North Africa have been sucked into the vortex of the so-called alien scourge. As argued in a United Nations Security Council (2011) Special Report;

Despite the considerable progress made in development and peace consolidation in some parts of West Africa (and in some instances the notable democratic and socioeconomic advances) and notwithstanding the fact that some countries, such as Ghana, have no history of violent national civil conflict, it seems that there are apparent structural deficiencies which have made much of the region particularly susceptible to the emerging threats. These vulnerabilities include weak border control systems (leading to porous international boundaries), the inability of criminal justice systems to ensure effective operation of the rule of law and inadequate coordination and information sharing among relevant national agencies, as well as limited institutional cooperation across borders with neighbouring countries.

Such weaknesses as outlined above would seem to be consequences of corruption as manifest in economic mismanagement and lack of social investment exacerbated by civil wars, which in some cases have significantly decimated human capital, social infrastructure, and productive national development assets....(UNSC, 2011). Beyond this, the weaknesses are capable of encouraging drug trafficking and promoting terrorism.

In view of the fact that many of the countries that are experiencing terrorism are yet to find lasting solution to it, it is expedient to grill some causative factors that have promoted the scourge of terrorism in West Africa. It is in that context that this paper begins with examining some European colonialist propaganda theories of alleged inferiority of Africans. This is followed with an interrogation of the nexus of corruption, drug trafficking and terrorism as a combined force for insecurity and underdevelopment in West Africa in its recent history. It is argued here that, while corruption and drug trafficking have combined to aid terrorism, the three have in turn found unity in promoting insecurity in the sub-region and festering the challenge of underdevelopment. The study

concludes on establishing the point of divergence between the European propaganda theories on the one hand and the tripod on the other, thus unveiling how the latter combine to work against human insecurity and development in West Africa.

EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM AND THE PROPAGANDA OF INFERIOR IDENTITY ON AFRICA

European imperialism, colonization and neo-colonization were well-crafted scripts of domination by Europe to ensure “forceful seizure of African land and domination of its people” (Okajare, 2016, pp.32-39). This foreign domination venture was calibrated through theories and propaganda of inferiority carefully foisted on Africans by way of cultural imperialism which signified making the people accept their extant culture and identity as inferior to Europe’s or what is called Western civilization. While Africans had evolved rich (but admittedly imperfect like others elsewhere globally) cultural heritage that had shaped their being, outlook and identity, the European invaders were able to replace this heritage with a uniform orientation of perennial sense of inferiority through slave trade, colonization and neo-colonization. This orientation has been consistently reinforced through Western education and religion such that, today, the average African struggles with proudly holding up his/her original, holistic identity (Chiwanza, 2023).

Two major planks of the European domineering propaganda against African identity are that, one, Africans had no significant historical sense or experience across ages, and two, Africans made no major contribution to human civilization. It follows, therefore, that few instances of material or technical development found in Africa were products of external influences. Friedrich Hegel and Hugh Trevor-Ropper were loud intellectual voices for this propaganda. Hegel (1956) holds the view that Africa was unhistorical or no historical part of the world, or better still akin to an undeveloped spirit - still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution. He sees Egypt, globally acclaimed as a land of ancient civilization, and the northern tip of Africa as parts of the Mediterranean and of Asian continent. Thus, according to Hegel, this state of Africa’s unconsciousness and incapacity justified Europe’s enslavement and eventual colonization of the continent. He holds the view that slavery marked the beginning of human feeling among Negroes (Kuykendall, 1993, p.572). The famous three Cs - Civilization, Christianity and Commerce - of colonization followed later validating what became the concept of ‘White Man’s Burden’, which had been developed by Rudyard Kipling (1899) in a poem. Also, Dr Nott (1851) had delivered a lecture in the USA in where he defiantly declared that Africans were incapable

of civilizing themselves. In his exact words, “There Africa stands with her fifty millions (sic) of blacks, and there she has stood for the last five thousand years, with this people occupying the same countries, without one step towards civilizations; and all the experiments in the United States, the West Indies, &c., have failed”. On the other hand, Hugh Trevor-Ropper was more frontal in 1963 when he propagated the Eurocentric view that Africa had no history before its contact with Europe. He argued that “There is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach but for now the rest is darkness, and darkness is not a subject of history”. He added that African history constituted “only the unedifying and unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe” (1965).

The summation of the foregoing European theories of African inferiority presuppose that Africans are bereft of initiatives, ideas and creativity to solve emerging problems. Therefore, are violent conflicts prevalent in West Africa because the people are inferior humans, incapable of instituting effective structure of state administration? The correctness or otherwise of these Eurocentric views about contemporary Africa, nay West Africa in the present context, can be established by examining the patterns of human insecurity and underdevelopment as well as the causative or promotional influence of the corruption, drug trafficking and terrorism nexus on those patterns.

HUMAN INSECURITY AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT INTERSECTION IN WEST AFRICA

It is an evident truism that human security and development are inseparable in any social setting. Human security simply implies the safety of human persons from arm and hurt, which the State is expected to hold as its primary duty. Sustainable development is predictably achievable where human security is assured by the State. In post-colonial West Africa, there have been instances of significant loss of human security, easily identifiable along three distinct but intersecting patterns. One, the pervasive poverty in West Africa has encouraged equally pervasive occurrence of crimes that promote human insecurity like internal conflicts (anti-State rebellion, civil wars, inter-religious and inter-ethnic strife), theft, armed robbery, violent destruction of properties, rape, and so on. Two, international organized crimes like drug trafficking, trans-border violent robbery, human trafficking, illegal arms deals, and cyber-crimes are common realities in post-colonial West Africa. Three and most frightening is the near-endemic nature of Islamic extremism and terrorism in the West African Sahelian region perpetrated by jihadist bodies like ISWAP (Islamic State of West African Province), AQIM (Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb)

and Boko Haram. As Denécé and Rodier (2012, pp.36-52) have argued,

Internal conflicts, jihadist terrorism and organized crime have a deep impact on the economy, the development and the security of the peoples of West Africa. They cause many civilian casualties as a result of massacres and forced displacements and violations of human rights continue to be committed. Instability and insecurity continue to spread partly because of the structural weakness of governments in the region, affecting major urban centres in West Africa as well as in remote areas. Rife with trafficking of all sorts, these violent areas are breeding grounds for criminal and terrorist organisations. Foreign businesses and nationals in these countries face growing insecurity in their daily lives and are particularly worried by these developments in which some do not hesitate in shutting down their businesses, further weakening the countries concerned.

With the prevalence of internal conflict such as civil wars (as witnessed in Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire), which usually resulted from inter-religious tensions and/or inter-ethnic struggles over space, political inclusion and resources; trans-national organized crimes due to structural and functional weaknesses of national governments in West Africa; and spread of terrorism in its Sahel, West Africa, like other parts of the African continent, is deeply enmeshed in the vortex of human insecurity and underdevelopment. This is because, apart from exposing the citizens and residents to danger, foreign direct investment opportunities, which is crucial to development of low-income countries like West Africa's, are impeded in the sub-region. This explains the visible existence of underdevelopment in West Africa.

A consideration of various manifest features of underdevelopment as a social reality will further illuminate the categorization of West Africa as a sub-region characterized by underdevelopment. As Apogan-Yella (2005, p.2) argues,

Most underdeveloped countries are marked or characterized by a number of common traits. They have distorted and highly dependent economies devoted to the production of primary products for export to the developed world and provide markets for finished goods. They have strong traditional, rural social structures, high population growth and widespread poverty. They are characterized by poor and undemocratic governance, high illiteracy rate, disease, abuse of individual freedom and liberty and high national debt. Public officials and people placed in authority are generally not accountable to their citizens.

That almost all the above traits are identifiable with West African countries is not deniable. These indicators have combined to promote underdevelopment by way of economic insecurity via endemic poverty; political insecurity through frequent collapse of democratic structures; poor inter-state trade within the subregion due to weak national economic systems; poor balance of trade and balance of payment profile because of weak exchange and over-reliance on primary product or mono-product economy; uncontrolled population growth and high level of illiteracy due to prevalent influence of

ignorance and superstitions; gross loss of fundamental human rights as a result of over-bearing, yet illegitimate leadership, weak civil society and compromised press; and lack of accountable leadership due to weaponization of poverty and ethnic affiliations by the ruling elite. However, the degree of intensity may differ from one country to another because these countries are at different levels of development. Also, signs and symptoms of underdevelopment may be more visible in the countryside and urban slums than they are in the cities where the economic and political elite more often reside in, in unbelievable socio-economic grandeur. This is amply the case in Nigeria for example. It follows, therefore, that while underdevelopment often results directly from insecurity among other factors, insecurity in turn festers underdevelopment. Thus, an insecure and underdeveloped country, subregion or region is in a dire strait where it is vulnerable to endemic proportion of human security loss, with very dim hope of recovery. Put differently, West Africa is patently on the threshold of unimaginable crisis given the handshake of corruption, drug trafficking and terrorism which are herein considered as the sub-region's main anti-security and anti-development tripod.

CORRUPTION IN POST-COLONIAL WEST AFRICA - AN OVERVIEW

Offering a perspective on corruption is an uphill task as it is entangled in definitional ambiguity whether it is contextualized as a social, political, economic or even legal concept. It is simply difficult to define corruption. This is particularly so because of its multiple fronts of manifestation. While this paper is not necessarily a theoretical expose of corruption as a concept, it is pertinent to situate the discourse properly by way of conceptual clarification using the moralist and functionalist perspectives as tool of analysis to assure understanding of the concept within the West African reality. The moralists argue that "corruption is an immoral and unethical phenomenon that contains a set of moral aberrations from moral standards of society, causing loss of respect for and confidence in duly constituted authority" (Gould, 1991, p.468). In this vein, Nye (1997, p.417) as a major promoter of this school of thought has strengthened the position by defining corruption as "a behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains, or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence". The functionalists (ably represented by Huntington, 1968) on the other hand, stress what they perceive as possible benefits of corruption by suggesting that it can fast-track burdensome procedures, protect the interest of the excluded by enabling them buy access to political influence and patronage and even

produce the *de facto* policies in a better way than those that are channeled through legitimate processes. They aver that corruption is a way to “grease the wheels” to get things done, especially for investors and companies, which helps the cut through burdensome regulatory requirements, distributing resources, and generating economic growth (Manzetti and Wilson, 2007; Marquette and Pfeiffer, 2015).

For the (West) African reality, the moralist thought appears more plausible as it captures the manner of manifestation of the corruption phenomenon in the sub-region. This agrees more fittingly with the United Nations’ definition of corruption as:

An abuse of public power for private gain that hampers the public interest. This gain may be direct or indirect...Corruption entails a confusion of private with the public sphere or an illicit exchange between the two spheres. In essence, corrupt practices involve public officials acting in the best interest of private concerns (their own or those of others) regardless of, or against, the public interest (2001).

Transparency International defines corruption as the

behaviour on the part of officials in public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those close to them by abuse of public power entrusted to them. This would include embezzlement of funds, theft of corporate or public property, as well as corrupt practices such as bribery, extortion or influence peddling (cf. Atuobi, 2007, p.6).

This is also further illuminated in terms of manifestation and impact that:

From children denied an education to elections decided by money not votes, public sector corruption comes in many forms. Bribes and backroom deals don’t just steal resources from the most vulnerable - they undermine justice and economic development, and destroy public trust in leaders. But while the results of corruption are clear, the real extent of the problem is harder to pin down. Corruption is shadowy and secretive by nature. We all know corruption is a problem.... (Transparency International, 2013).

While Transparency International focuses on the public sector, the World Bank offers a more comprehensive definition that hinges corruption in both the private and public sectors by defining corruption as involving “behaviour on the part of officials in the public and private sectors in which they [public and private officials] improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves and/or those close to them, or induce others to do so, by misusing the position in which they are placed”. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2010, p.4) stress this more by using the World Bank’s control of corruption indicators to view corruption as the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests.

In a tone that is directly opposed to the functionalist school of thought, corruption has been seen as “all those

improper actions or transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events, judgement and position of trust” (Vision, 2010; Committee, cf. Okoduwa, 2006, p.2). In a similar vein, Shang-Ji Wei (1999) explains corruption from its impact and solution perspective thus;

Corruption is a major obstacle to economic development. It reduces domestic investment, discourages foreign direct investments, inflates government spending and shifts government spending away from education, health and infrastructure maintenance towards less efficient (more manipulable) public projects. International pressure is useful but more critical is reform of domestic institutions and a focus on the incentive problem. Abuse of power by public officials should not pay.

From all indications, the above definitions are quite descriptive of the reality of pervasive corruption in the West African sub-continent. Also, there is no denying the fact that corruption breeds negative impact in the main. This has been vividly revealed in the development gap between Africa and other parts of the world particularly the Euro-American axis. Africa is simply labeled as one of the poorest regions of the world. More painfully, within Africa, the West African sub-region is arguably the poorest region of the poor African continent. The African precarious experience finds justification for the well-expressed concern of the United Nations of the impact of corruption thus; “Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish”. And that corruption poses problems and threats “to the stability and security of societies, undermining the institutions and values of democracy, ethical values and justice, and jeopardizing sustainable development and the rule of law” (UNODC, 2003, iii, 5).

It is a truism that corruption has become a major descriptive feature of contemporary West Africa. This is evident in the nexus between living standard and cost of living in the sub-region as elsewhere in most parts of Africa as evident in the indicators of human development index. While the living standard is pitifully low, the cost of living is very high and unaffordable for the greater majority of the people. Most of the basic requirements of life are not available to the common folks, while the process of governance since independence has been fraught with challenges that are capable of stifling the process of development. In West Africa, the elitist nature of leadership and governance inherited from the former colonial masters has been nurtured to maturity in the post-colonial era. It is in this context that Berssellaar and Decker (2011, pp.741-752) have argued with special reference to two West African states (Ghana and Nigeria) that, corruption has grown to the level of an institution in Africa, “that allowed an uneasy cohabitation of

colonial and domestic African institutions to grow into a composite, syncretic system facilitated by generalized corruption". In its latest Corruption Perception Index report, Transparency International (2024) indicates that "the Sub-Saharan African region once again registered the lowest average score on the *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI), at just 33 out of 100, with 90 per cent of countries scoring below 50".

The immediate import of this horrible scenario is that corruption has inflicted constant pressure on public services in West Africa, which is already in a dire strait in terms of human development indicators. Corruption has eaten deep into the whole gamut of national life across West Africa with the corrosion of governmental architecture and the sinking of growing number of people into the vortex of poverty, ignorance and disease. Indeed, Aidoo notes, "if you want to put a human face to corruption...then see how we have kids who walk miles to school because there are no public transport systems". He adds that "You see women and mothers who give birth and die because there are no basic drugs or equipment at the hospitals, and no qualified or trained health professionals. You realize that many of our impoverished populations do not have access to clean drinking water" (2014, p.1).

From all indications, the foregoing indicates direct consequences of the proliferation of political crises in the West African sub-region. From Liberia to Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and recently Mali, Niger Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Fasso, proofs of political instability, weak statehood, and worsening insecurity are commonplace. Closely associated with this is corruption, which predictably has become exacerbated due to the desperation of the political class to sustain itself in power in the affected countries through reckless deployment of political patronage. More often than not, political leaders usually appeal to ethnic and religious sentiments by forming human shield around themselves with members of their ethnic clans and religious persuasion who bask in the euphoria of their kinsman/member's hold on government to heighten the exclusion of other citizens who are 'not fortunate' to belong to their clan or belief system. Consequently, bribery, rigged elections, shady contract deals with multinational businesses operating in the natural resources sector, and illicit cash transfers out of countries are some of the more common forms of graft. Also, in spite of what may appear like positive effects of corruption or progress made in the economic, social and political fronts, corruption remains a huge challenge in sub-Saharan Africa (Ighodaro and Igbinedion, 2020, p.176; Staeritz, 2024, p.3; Duri, 2020). Aidoo emphasized on the negative impact of the scourge of illicit cash transfer by commenting that in economic sense, filtering away millions of dollars every year by corruption is very destructive in terms of its impact on society. It is very corrosive in how it undermines growth and development and the well-being of our population.

In this regard, Nigeria would seem to stand out for the contradictory and unpleasant fame of being the most populated and strongest economy as well as the most corrupt with the worst case of illicit cash transfers and resource theft in the sub-region. For example, the Nigerian oil industry as managed by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) is plagued with regular allegations and counter-allegations of irregularities, malpractice, under-hand sharp practices and non-subscription to due process, which have combined to provoke rebellion against the Nigerian State by people of the oil-bearing region. A damning report on such under-hand sharp practice was reported recently in one of the national dailies that

An investigation has commenced into how the federal government has been allegedly short-changed by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in swapping crude for refined products. Nigeria is feared to be losing money through opaque contracts in which crude oil worth billions of dollars is given to traders in exchange for refined imports, mainly gasoline.... It appears that the value of the crude was more than the value of the refined imported (The Nation, 2015, p.6).

The report further adds that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has investigated various oil scandals in the recent past namely a fuel subsidy fraud costing the government \$6.8 billion between 2009-2011 (sic). But due to lack of political will from the top, only a handful were prosecuted with little result (The Nation, 2015, p.6).

As a matter of fact, the Buhari regime between 2015 and 2019 lamented the pervasive spate of corruption in Nigeria under the preceding Goodluck Jonathan administration, and the humongous sums of money allegedly siphoned. Efforts were made to recover some of the looted funds. In another instance, the Liberia's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative noted that nearly all resource contracts signed since 2009 had violated extant regulations (Valdmanis, 2013). But beyond the hoopla of blame and power transition from one regime to another, as typified in Nigeria, there is as yet little proof that corruption is hated, unwanted and fought. Instead, what appears evident is that the ecology provided by successive administration in Africa, nay West Africa, is one that does not favour effective functioning of the architecture of governance. As Kuerschner (2013) avers, "This environment is such that enables greedy individuals or groups to seek power and maintain it, often through violence, in order to strive for private gain rather than the well being (sic) of their people. Thus, greed-motivated power elites in the context of already weak states cause a spiral of hatred and violence: mismanagement, unjust distribution of goods and exploitation of vulnerable economies lead to poverty, for example through unemployment. The majority of the people suffer without having the chance to raise demands peacefully". The immediate consequence of this is that the people are

vulnerable and they become soft targets for anti-State elements who “seek to (violently) oppose the ruling elite” (Hegre *et al.*, 2009, p.602).

Another dimension of the corruption-terrorism debate is the challenge of deliberate mismanagement of state resources. Although, Kuerschner (2013) points out what he calls ‘classic dilemma’ meaning African countries in general lack the resources to establish a reliably functioning state administration, which in turn hinders the acquisition of those resources, this study deems deliberate mismanagement of resources as more fitting explanation. Normally and naturally, resources are either human or material or both. In the case of Africa, both are in generous supply. But the deliberate failure (or wicked refusal) of the ruling elite to emplace a functional state administration architecture for effective, broadly beneficial management of state resources is critical to government’s loss of bonding and legitimacy, which in turn breeds state-citizens disconnect and people’s loatheness and opposition against government/state. Thus, the state loses its fundamental basis. As Richard (2006, pp.22-23) posits, while the extant dysfunctional system makes leadership recruitment process easy for unprincipled individuals and dishonest groups, it also shrinks their power of sovereignty. Consequently, they seek other unconventional means to remain afloat in power, which, in turn, breeds violent conflict.

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN WEST AFRICA - A NOTE

Understanding drug trafficking in West Africa with recourse to regional security and development draws attention to the profiling activities of trans-national crimes induced by drug barons and peddlers, and the attendant threat to regional stability. Though the drug trafficking phenomenon is necessarily not a recent development with the region, it has particularly grown to become a pervasive menace since the beginning of the present century. This has been adduced to “a strategic shift of Latin American drug syndicates toward the rapidly growing European market and [again,] in response to the more robust U.S anti-narcotics strategies” (Aning and Pokoo, 2014, p.1). While this may not be altogether disputed, it is important to add that instabilities in the West African region since the 1960s has partly been a by-product of unrelenting military incursions in politics, civil unrests and insurgent uprisings in a handful of states within the region. The same has rendered fragile the socio-political and economic formation of the region, which in turn created a weak regional milieu for the proliferation of drug trafficking. Accordingly, instability became the outcome of the violent manifestations across the region. Drug trafficking in this connection thrived on the flow of small arms and light weapons from extra-regional climes and within the region.

Drug couriers invariably exploited the networks of arms traffickers to expand their market reach within the region.

The trafficking networks have grown considerably such that West Africans have extended their involvement in the drug - Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin, Marijuana and others - trade, not just as consumers but retail marketers at home and abroad. It has been suggested that Nigerian drug trafficking groups, for instance, have been recognised to be the most organised, if not notorious, for their criminal approach to the trade (Awanbot, 2009, pp.57-66). In this sense, drug trafficking as a term and practice is not strange in West Africa, especially since the last decade of the twentieth century. In fact, as will be shown shortly, the region has assumed the position of a key player in the international illicit drug market system.

Drug trafficking, as the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC 2010) defines it, is “a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subjected to drug prohibition laws”. The latter does not only provide a succinct explanation on the nature of the illegal trade but illustrates the dynamics of drug trafficking in West Africa as in other regions of the world. The drug trade in West Africa began to draw international and regional attention from the beginning of the twenty-first century. This was particularly due to the fact that, while Pakistan and Afghanistan in Asia and Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, even Mexico in Latin America serve as the main production hubs of these outlawed drugs, West Africa serves as their marked transit and repackaging zone thus enhancing the growth of European drug market (UNODC 2011a; UNODC 2011b; UNODC 2013). For instance, the UNODC estimates that

approximately 40 to 50 tons of cocaine destined for European market passes through the African continent each year. The illicit profits from such activities amounts to at least 1.8 billion dollars, but it could be much larger according to some estimates. Such profits provide drug traffickers with the financial means to destabilise already weak government structures and law enforcement institutions in various [West] African countries (cf. Rousseau, 2017, p.19).

The above does not only succinctly establish the intersection between drug trafficking and regional development and security challenges, it presents a useful estimation drawn from the 2013 *World Drug Report* (UNODC, 2013). According to the report, the data provided only covered for years 2010-2012. In a modest sense, it could therefore be assumed that such estimation a decade after, most probably, would have doubled (UNODC, 2008). It is in the light of this that West Africa has been marked a significant player in the global outlawed drug trade as both consumers and trading partners.

Meanwhile, starting from the mid-2000s, perceptions were high on the threat implications of the illicit drug and West Africa’s involvement especially. However, in view

of West Africa's involvement, Aning and John argue from a geo-strategic perspective that the geographical location of the region suitably facilitates easy trade links from the producers to the market destinations (Aning and Pokoo, 2014, p.1). Though this is neatly captured, it is instructive to include that West African's political instabilities, economic poverty and social vulnerabilities readily prepared the region for such unlawful trade incursion and consolidation. In view of the drug trafficking outrage, efforts were set in motion to forestall the envisaged threats to regional security and overall development. One of such concerted efforts, though on the continental level, was taken at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2007 which saw a revision of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2007-2012 (UNODC, 2007). The rationale was to develop strategies to address the drug challenge through prevention and control mechanisms with the joint action of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), including the United Nations' African Institute for Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (UN-AFRI) among other related agencies. By the end of 2012, given unsatisfactory outcomes of the initial initiative, African Union re-modified the Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention in 2013. This time, it was a four-year agenda (2013-2017) with a health centered objective, giving particular attention to the health, socio-economic and security wellbeing of the people due to envisaged consequences of outlawed drug consumption and trafficking (UNODC, 2013).

With respect to the consequences of drug trafficking in West Africa, Rousseau (2017), Adeyanju (2020), and Shaw (2012) have differently examined the impact of illicit drug trade on West Africa. Put together, these insightful studies did not only establish the health implications for the region - a subject that primarily influenced the re-modification of the Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention in 2013 - but unbundled the threat and assault it poses to security and state building in the region. Aning and Pokoo's explanations along this line may be of some relevance here:

Recent seizures and arrests in several West African countries have shed light on how the work of trafficking networks is facilitated by a range of actors, including businessmen, politicians, members of security forces and the judiciary, clergymen, traditional leaders and youths. In addition to the general physical and social conditions in West Africa such as porous borders, weak institutions, corruption and political patronage, poverty and ethnic identities, traffickers easily connect with local leaders and are able to establish and operate informal social networks... In some cases, the formal security apparatus also provides cover for traffickers. For example, high level elected officials and security personnel were found to be involved in a range of cocaine and heroin trafficking seizures in the late 2000s (2014, p.13).

This is not only instructive of the security threat posed by drug trafficking in the region, but it also describes the

pervasive integration of trafficker activities into the core fabrics of West African social, economic and political formations. Be that as it may, an assumption that drug money is used for electioneering activities in Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and Nigeria among other states in the region may not be completely discountenanced (Adeyanju, 2020, p.74).

Significantly, however, West African RECs, especially Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) embraced collaboration with UNODC in 2008. The essence was to pursue the eradication of drug trafficking and related crime in West Africa. Whatever the outcome was by 2012, ECOWAS states pushed for an extension of the programme to keep up the fight against drug trafficking. Commending this drive, the President of the United Nations Security Council remarks thus “

The Security Council commends the initiatives and measures taken by the States of the Region to tackle the threat of drug trafficking, in particular the extension of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2018) and of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan to address the Growing Problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa (2008-2015), as well as the implementation of the UNODC Regional Programme for West Africa, underlining that combating drug-trafficking is the primary responsibility of States (UNSC, 2013).

Though the anti-drug trafficking efforts seemed to have achieved some successes in the area of nabbing culprits facilitating the drug trade through land border regions, maritime routes and air ports (Adeyanju, 2020), this has not necessarily put paid to the drug trafficking problem and the attendant security and development challenges it poses to the region. It is within this premise that the present researchers share the view of Aning and Pokoo (2014, p.6) on a connection between drug trafficking and terrorism.

TERRORISM IN THE WEST AFRICAN SAHEL

The IEP Global Terrorism Index (2023, p.5) declares that “The Sahel region in Sub-Saharan Africa is now the major epicenter of terrorism, with the Sahel accounting for more terrorism death in 2022 than both South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) combined”. Eminently, terrorism has remained a tossing challenge to democratic consolidation, economic integration as well as human and social security in West Africa for over two decades now, particularly since the closing years of the 1990s. Indeed, no other region on the continent has experienced expansive proliferation of terrorism-induced violence in the last half-a-decade than the West African Sahel. While the West African region comprises of some 15 states (depending how it is analysed), the West African Sahel, sometimes referred to as the central Sahel region

is taken to be made up of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Aliyu Dahiru's commentary on the latter with respect to terrorism in the region is relevant here:

The central Sahel region, which includes Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, has been one of the most terrorised in the World, harbouring terrorists such as Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama'atu Nusratil Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (iS-Sahel), and Jama'atu AhlulSunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad (JAS), who engage in various violent activities such as pillage, mass kidnappings, and suicide missions in an attempt to implement their violent interpretation of the sharia (Dahiru, 2024).

The devastating activities of these terrorist groups in their different national bases have developed transnational networks not only in the central Sahel but across the various states in the West African region. By this, West African Sahel states and its neighbours have been heavily inundated by terrorist operations and violent destructions. The unrelenting attacks by violent extremists on security structures and civilians in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and even Nigeria, which has been significantly linked to jihadist terrorism, continues to repel security and development efforts across West Africa (Denécé and Rodier, 2012, pp.40-44).

Terrorism has been defined as "any action that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians and non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or international organisation to do something or not to do something" (The Guardian, 2005). Imobighe (2006, p.18; 2009, p.15) identifies for critical elements as planks for conceptualizing terrorism. These include the environment of terrorism; the nature of the actions associated with terrorism; the target of terrorist actions and the objectives for such actions. In a broad sense, terrorism includes a wide range of complex threats through organised (ethno-religious, civil and political) violence in conflict-prone regions, international fundamentalists, as well as the use of chemical, ecological, and even thermonuclear energy to bolster fear, tension and establish influence. In the case of the West African Sahel, it is necessary to underscore that terrorism has not only posed severe threats but generated pervasive socio-political and economic deteriorations as well as adverse demographic and humanitarian conditions (Akanji, 2019, pp.94-112). The United Nations Security Council (2020) provides a dimension of terrorism-induced security complication on the region thus:

In Burkina Faso alone, as of June, 921,000 people have been forced to flee, representing a 92 per cent rise over 2019 figures. In Mali, nearly 240,000 people are internally displaced - 54 per cent of them women - while in Niger, 489,000 people were forced to flee, including Nigerian and Malian refugees. In Nigeria, 7.7 million people will need emergency assistance in 2020.

In view of the above, the West Africa Sahel has experienced harmful trends of social dislocations,

demographic displacements and institutional instabilities due to terrorist operations. Besides, a recent estimation submits that the Sahel region accounted for 43 percent of total global deaths associated with terrorism in 2022 (IEP, 2023, p.2). In fact, the Humanitarian Action (2023) estimations have also suggested that some 17 million persons in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, that is about one-fifth of the population of these countries put together, are in critical security conditions that require humanitarian assistance and protection. This is a consequence of the activities of terrorist groups that have created operational hubs not just within these states but strategically positioned themselves across inter-state borderlands, leveraging on the porous and easily permissible regional borders to launch their terrifying and homicidal attacks (Adebile, 2024, pp.16-15). Meanwhile, political instability in West African states, especially in the Sahel zone has heightened in the past few years due to increasing Islamic terrorism and organised transnational crimes among other factors. This has, in turn, influenced a new wave of military ascendancy in the region. For instance, military coup had rolled back democratisation processes in Mali, Chad, Guinea and Burkina Faso, and efforts to re-instate democracy have not been so successful. This explains the background to the formation of Alliance of Sahel States. As reported,

On 26 July, 2023, soldiers from Niger's presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum, conducting the fourth coup d'état among members states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since 2020. ...Mali and Burkina Faso, which saw years of worsening terrorist violence before their recent coups... On 16 September 2023, the military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter, creating the Alliance of Sahel States (ASE) as architecture of collective defence and mutual assistance. The three countries committed to combatting all forms of terrorism and organized crime in their common area... (UNSC, 2024).

This grim situation has attracted the attention of the Security Council, which expressed its frustration and hope thus; We appreciate the efforts of ECOWAS, with the support of the United Nations, to restore constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, and we reiterate our call for compliance with the commitments agreed and timetables established for that purpose. Secondly, we express our concern about the deterioration of the security situation in the central Sahel, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali, and the persistent danger of the expansion of terrorist violence to the south (UNSC, 2023, p.12). Of course, the ECOWAS has been unsuccessful in restoring constitutional order in those countries. Instead, the situation has further polarized the regional integration body as Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have withdrawn their membership of ECOWAS. Also, the security decline in the Sahel is spreading far and wide beyond the Sahelian immediate borders. In addition, terrorism and related trans-border crimes in the West African Sahel

have worsened the security conditions and development prospects of the region. The almost five-decade old West African integration agenda (ECOWAS) is gradually being dismantled as a result of regional instability and lack of cohesion. The implications are critical to the sustenance of regional security, development and integration. While the core states of terrorist operations in West Africa and the Sahel are situated in Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso, their ideologies and activities have contagiously shaped fundamentalist manifestations in their neighbouring states, especially Niger, Côté d'Ivoire, Benin and even Togo (Voice of America, 2024).

Essentially, while it is true that the pervasive wave of terrorism continues to bedevil the region, its attendant implications for regional security and development have necessitated responses from both state actors and multilateral diplomatic frameworks within and outside the region, engaging various strategies to tackle the challenge. For example, ECOWAS has developed and introduced a number of counter terrorism initiatives in the region such as the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating of Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT), ECOWAS Black List of Terrorist and Criminal Networks (ECOLIST) and even the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Training Centre and Technical Assistance Directory among others (Akanji, 2019, pp.100-104). In the same way, some collaborative efforts have been engaged, establishing Multi-national Joint Task Force to contend against cross-border operations of terrorist groups in the region (Tar and Bala, 2021, pp.379-392; Bala and Tar, 2021, pp.186-207). Although these efforts have not yielded the expected outcomes such as limiting the proliferation of terrorism and decimating its operations in the region, it may however be of some relevance to suggest that the efforts have signaled collective dissatisfaction with, and condemnation of, terrorist activities, as well as activating intentions to create organised architectures to fight against terrorism in the region.

CONCLUSION - THEORIES VERSUS REALITIES

This article has examined the West African human insecurity and underdevelopment challenges in the context of corruption-drug trafficking-terrorism nexus, identified as tripodal forces festering the twin challenges. It has also unpacked the European ethno-centric view of inferiority label placed on Africans before, during and beyond colonization. The study found that the prevalence of human insecurity and underdevelopment in West Africa is not necessarily a product of any mental or physiological inferiority of Africans. Hence, the central thesis of the study is that the challenges of insecurity and underdevelopment in West Africa do not necessarily validate the European invalid and baseless theory of

inferiority foisted on Africans from the preparatory years of colonial rule. This is as corruption, drug trafficking and terrorism are inter-connected global phenomena, which have combined to provoke insecurity across board, not in any way peculiar to Africa. While it is true that West African states are found in the list of poorest and least secure countries in the world, this pitiable state goes beyond the labeling of inferiority, as it is also not right to continue to lay the blame on colonization alone. Instead, it requires collaborative efforts of West African state actors, the civil society, members of the academia, youth organisations, regional development partners and other foreign intervention/multilateral agencies to work together to demand accountable leadership from the ruling elite; rid the subregion of the nefarious activities of drug traffickers; and develop more proactive all-embracing, multi-thronged strategies for tackling terrorism beyond the singular kinetic approach. The anti-corruption, anti-narcotics and anti-terrorism battles cannot be left to the governments and inter-state organizations like ECOWAS alone, because the negative impact of these ills transcend the geo-spatial limit of West Africa. Thus, all local and global hands should be on deck to stem the tides of corruption, drug trafficking and terrorism in West Africa.

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