

SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND INSECURITY (HAB.1:1-4). AN EPITOME OF THE NIGER DELTA SCENARIO

OBODOEGBULAM AGI OTTO, Ph.D

*Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuruuniversity of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt*

Abstract

The world over, there is a persistent struggle between good and evil. This is characterized by man's inhumanity to man. This paper examined the problem of social injustice as experienced by Prophet Habakkuk during his time as a prophet in Judah. The paper catalogues the glaring cases of injustice in Nigeria especially as it affects the Niger Delta people. This paper adopted Adams (1965) socio-economic theories of equity and Marx (1956) class struggle to demonstrate that equity simply means justice and class struggle as being the direct result of the oppressed class trying to resist operation. The paper adopted the interdisciplinary approach in the discussion. It underscores the fact that despite the abundant mineral resources in the Niger Delta, it is the least developed in Nigeria as excruciating poverty and other dehumanizing conditions characterize their condition of living. The paper concluded that the Nigerian government and other developmental agencies should look inward and develop the area like other parts of the country by constructing roads, bridges, electricity and modern shelter, among others.

Keywords: Injustice, marginalization, environmental pollution, under-development and agitation.

Introduction

The world over, there is a persistent struggle of good over evil. Throughout the human race, social disequilibrium is one of the challenges which stare humanity in the face. Whether developed or developing nation, first or third world, it is common to hear complaints of social injustice. In the pre-colonial era, lands, fishing rights over rivers, creeks, control of markets for raw materials, mining rights over salt lakes and so on, provide challenges as to who should have control over territories and quantities (Gabriel, 2009). Unfortunately, all were to advance personal interests.

The struggle for self-determination arises as a result of perceived marginalization, deprivation and dehumanization. It is usually unacceptable for any individual to watch others misuse items or materials of value to him. Ihieriohanma (2006) identifies three basic or fundamental rights which every individual should enjoy, these include, (a) civil and political rights, (b) social and economic rights and (c) environmental and political rights. All these, are enshrined in U.N. charter of 1948.

Every individual no matter how lowly placed, expects to be treated with dignity. He would wish to be seen, recognized and heard. Even if his presence may not make any difference, he would wish to be seen, recognized or heard. This will give him a sense of belonging that he has been treated like a human being.

According to social geography, the physical, economic, religious and political environment is very important to man. The Ecosystems (wide and marine lives) go a long

way to shape his culture. These explain why living organisms thrive better in their natural environment.

In every culture whether of (animal or plant kingdoms) there is a strong relationship between an organism and his environment. Similarly, the growth or development of any organism is influenced by his environment. While some environments are natural, something artificial could equally be created. Never the less, there is a marked distinction between a natural and an artificial creation. Ken Saro Wiwa once observed that “The environment is man’s first right”.

Where an individual perceives that his physical, social, economic, religious or political environment is threatened, everything around him is treated with suspicion. Similarly once a person observes an atmosphere of insecurity, he becomes agitated or antagonistic as a way of self-defense. In corroboration, The Business Day Newspaper of July 4th 2005 asserts that “hopelessness and poverty drive young people into a rebel group in exchange for money or a share of the loot”. In another respect, the report of the global peace summit 1994 presents the issue of security challenges thus “ensuring freedom from wants and freedom from fear for all persons is the best approach to tackling the problem of global insecurity”. This paper examines the experience and complaints of Habakkuk concerning “social injustice” as a cause of insecurity, and relates them to the Niger Delta predicament.

Theoretical Overview

The theoretical lens of this article focuses on the equity theory of Adams and Marx’s class struggle .Adams (1965) in his equity theory was of the view that “employees seek to maintain equality between the input which they bring to the job and the output which they receive from it. Here, the argument is that people value a fair treatment and recognition of their contribution of their input in a job situation. This theory amplifies the fact that motivation and sense of belonging encourages an individual to work harder.

According to Nwaenyi (2012) equity theory tries to explain relational satisfaction on the grounds of fair or unfair distribution of human resources within an interpersonal relationship.

Equity theory therefore supposes that an individual considers himself as been fairly treated based on the inter relationship between his input and output is recognized or compares to his colleagues. Though, equity theory is an economic supposition, it rightly fits into this particular discourse on social justice. In the view of Marx, politics is another way of achieving social adjustments without the application of force. On his part, Hegel sees society as moving on a balance of social change brought about by struggle and revolution of antithetical forces.

Based on the above, both Marx and Hegel agree that social change or revolution could be brought about by two factors, “necessity and inevitability”. To the two, one other way of achieving social change is through the control of power. Here, the power in question does not imply political power but economic. As Marx postulates; economic power is a prelude to political power.

In the quest for liberty, Marx disagrees that this can be realized through peaceful negotiation. He equally doubts the power of legislation to institute a just and equitable society. In this regard, social equity can only be possible through a consistent struggle of antithetical forces.

Habakkuk's Experience and Complaints:

Habakkuk was one of the prophets of Judah. Some of his contemporaries were Jeremiah, Amos, Isaiah and Micah. Another extra biblical account had also mentioned Daniel as a likely contemporary. He functioned as a temple prophet during the Chadean occupation of Judah probably between 605 B.C. to 598 B.C. and most likely, during the reign of king Jehoiakim, (Jehoiachim).

The high level of social injustice perpetrated by their captors angered him most. There is no type of evil that the Babylonians have not unleashed on the Jews who remained helpless because of their circumstance. Habakkuk presented his experience thus. Jehoalkim during the first three years of the Babylonian captivity imposed heavy taxation on his people. He also subjected them to other forms of inhuman treatments to ingratiate his benefactors. His revolt three years later was met with a total capitulation of the land. Nebuchadnezzar sent a band of raiders to invade the Jerusalem to quell the revolt. Jehoalkim died during this period.

His son Jehoachin who took over, did not find things easy either. He was deported to Babylon alongside with some strong members of Judah society. Simply put, the people of Judah saw hell in the hands of their masters who by simple assessment, were not better of the Jews.

Using the imagery of a fisherman, to demonstrate the level of social injustice perpetrated against his people by the Babylonians, Habakkuk petitioned God thus:

Why do you look on those who play the traitor, why say nothing while the wicked swallow someone more upright more than himself? Why treat people like fish of the sea? Like gliding creatures who have no leaders? They haul them all up their hook they catch them in their nets, they sweep them up in their dragnets and then make merry and rejoice. And so they offer a sacrifice to their nets, and burn incense to their dragnets, for by this, they get a rich living and lived on the fate of the land. In conclusion, they go on emptying their nets unceasingly slaughtering the nation without pity.

From the above, it is clear that evil has a price. Perpetrators of social injustice must certainly be cut off from their source of strength.

The concept of social injustice: Generally, scholars of social justice refer to social injustice as the lack of social justice. Therefore, many of the discourse on the ingredients of social justice, always focus on the issues of social injustice. Oko (2020), citing Rawls (1972) holds that "justice usually expresses itself in the following: social values, liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage". He adds that "Injustice, then, is simply inequalities that are not to the benefit of all". In the opinion of Rawls (1972), injustice is simply the absence of justice.

Premised on the above, it is apparent that social injustice emanates from the structured inequality prevalent in a society. In another respect, inequality ordinarily, refers to incapacity to acquire entitlements as citizen, goal achievements, and material advancements as a result of social discrimination and differentiation which results from socio-political cum economic predicament of an individual, group or society, (Mona Khechen, 2013). In corroboration, Opatow (2001) submits that social injustice expresses itself in the invincible harms that are inflicted but not seen and the rationalizations and justifications that supports them. In the opinion of Opatow (2001), these present themselves in the negative opinions which people hold against others. viz.: Education,

wealth, quality housing, civic services, and political power. He distinguishes between structural and direct social injustice.

Without doubt, inequality and injustices are produced in the socio-political process and economic policies of a state. As it were, this is characterized by marginalization or exclusion of a group. In every dimension, these are the prime factors causing social injustices. In simple terms, Christi (2001) notes that, exclusion intrinsically involves unequal access to liberty, freedom and justice. According to him, this is characterized by identity politics and economic discrimination. At such instances, freedom of choices is hardly available to socially excluded groups. Marginalization causes deprivation and denial of opportunity to equal access to life chances. To this end therefore, an unending circle of disadvantage unfolds where people fail to be at their best.

As stated above, Vittono (2012) contends that, Social injustice arises when the distribution of advantages and disadvantages in a society aren't equal. Social injustice is caused by certain barriers that prevent full social justice. These include: prejudice, discrimination, oppression, racism, casteism, classism, ableism, ageism, stereotyping and sexism among others.

The Niger Delta Scenario

Since the discovering of oil in the Niger Delta in 1956 in commercial quantity, the area witnessed a number of anomalies. Since then the land, people and culture are no longer what they used to be. As the oil prospecting companies trooped in, crisscrossing the landscape, the morals, values, culture and means of livelihood were adversely affected, and the identity of this people once noted for their industry and peaceful disposition disappeared, thus giving way to a new culture of indolence and dejection as many do not know exactly where to start and how.

The Niger Delta is one of seven deltaic regions of the world. It covers a total land mass of the entire South-South Region of Nigeria and includes Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Akwa Ibom and Rivers. The people are predominantly farmers and fishermen with rich mangrove forest which makes lumbering and carving profitable occupations. They settle in small city states with loose autonomy.

Ordinarily, the area is blessed with human and material resources with these, she can compare adequately with any part of the globe in terms of, natural endowment. Thus, the region had every course to be happy.

Unfortunately, since the discovery of crude oil in the region in 1956, the Niger Delta has lost all that she treasured. The oil referred to in some quarters as the black gold, has attracted excruciating poverty to the area instead of development. In Nigeria, proceed from oil is used to develop other parts of the country to the bitter exclusion of the region producing the wealth. Through the institution of obnoxious laws, management and control of oil wealth has been vested in the hands of the federal government. A good example is the land use decree of 1978 part of which states thus "The entire property in and control of all minerals, In, under or upon any lands in Nigeria, its continental sheffs and of all rivers, streams and water courses throughout Nigeria, any area covered by territorial waters or constituency, the exclusive economic zone is and shall be vested in the government of the federation for the and un-behalf of the people of Nigeria". Looking at the above law, one would be tempted to ask if this is a natural law or man made; with which intention and for which purpose.

Simply put, the Niger Delta region has very serious environmental challenges. Over 80% of the entire land mass is below sea level. The region is therefore, prone to flooding and other harsh weather conditions.

During the wet season most area are usually flooded and the inhabitants construct shift structures and erect wooden altars. Here, modern amenities of life could scarcely be found. The people drink water from the river, bathe in the river and defecate in the same river (Obodoegbulam, 2011). Transportation is either on foot or canoe and lately bicycle.

The oil companies operating in the region have no concern for the environment. Gas flaring and oil spills are daily occurrences. Over 30 million cubic liters of gas is flared daily in the Niger Delta. When you confront the oil companies they excuse themselves that the penalty should be upon the federal government. This then suggests that the Nigerian government receives money to poison the lives of her citizens, the Niger Delta. Following, the oil spills which occur regularly, both the land for agricultural purposes and the water for fishing are polluted. Therefore, the simple means of livelihood of the people are destroyed. Yet, no alternative vocation is provided to keep the people living.

Despite the huge revenue which accrues from oil and gas, the Niger Delta area still remains under developed. The people still live below poverty level. There is no specialist hospital or any other health facility to attend to the health problems incidental by the activities of oil exploration and production. Lives in the Niger Delta deserves something more than pity as majority of the population are moving skeletons dying gradually with each day that passes. A good number go to bed on empty stomach without hope of finding anything to eat the next day.

In some parts of the country, bridges are built on land for their inhabitants to “fly over”. Unfortunately, the Niger Delta region that needed bridges and walk ways to enable them move across, see nothing. The question remains, The Niger Delta region and Abuja, which region needed bridges more? Owing to the inaccessibility of the Niger Delta, Oil companies fly their staff and machinery by air. They also take food and drinking water along. If the food and water of the region are good and safe for human consumption, why are they not sourcing them from the areas of operation? This means that while they want to live, anything can happen to the host communities.

Yet, oil activities result in population displacement with attendant consequences, (Agi, 1995). As a people are displaced, both their land and culture will be lost. Their sacred sites desecrated and what makes them a people will no longer be. Then the question is, “what is man if he has no identity? This is the predicament of the ordinary Niger Delta person. On a daily basis, the life of a Niger Delta indigene is laid on the altar of Nigeria development without a monument in his memory. But for how long will this be?

The oil company workers who are accommodated in camps come with money which the local people do not have. They lure our young girls and beautiful ladies into, the sex trade (Ikpoko, 2023). Unfortunately, some cannot resist it because the stomach is empty and hunger can drive a person mad. The effect is that some give birth to bastards. In the Niger Delta region, it is possible to see someone with a pointed nose and brown hair and yet bearing Niger Delta names. Some of these persons turn out to be social miscreants because they have no root and no name to protect (Obodoegbulam, Egesimba, Dimkpa and Agi 2011).

In the Niger Delta like some other parts of Nigeria, a good name used to be a family's treasure. This explains why the people have family compound names. A person was usually identified by the family name he bears not by his personal name (Ohia and Onyedibia, 2003). In their characteristics of divide and rule, they instigate land intra and inter communal disputes in the region. This is usually to enable them escape from or withhold indefinitely any compensation due affected persons and communities. They incite brothers against themselves and encourage communities to go to war against each other in the name of compensation agitation. Unfortunately, while the disputes go on, oil exploration goes on. As compensations are held up, oil activities are supposed to be suspended pending when all matters associated with it are resolved. The fact remains that the people of the region has remained at the receiving ends.

Palliative Measures

It is now an accepted fact that the Niger Delta crisis which has been simmering for years is holding the nation's feet to the fire. This then supports the assertion that it is possible to fool some of the people some of the time but impossible to fool all the people all the time. Accordingly, the federal government of Nigeria is disturbed to prove to the civilized world that she does not mean to exterminate the people of the region.

In 1992, The Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission was set up and charged with the responsibility of improving the physical conditions of the Niger Delta. Unfortunately, this commission could not achieve their set objectives owing to political and bureaucratic bottle necks. First, the Commission complained of insufficient fund to enable her carry out her mandate. Secondly, appointment of members into the commission was aimed at compensation to some of the big guys. Before long, the commission was dissolved without achieving her mandates.

Another attempt was made in the year 2000 by the then Obasanjo regime when the Niger Delta Development Commission was set up with the same mandate earlier given to OMPADEC. Its fund were to come from the Federal government in conjunction with the Oil Companies. Unfortunately, the NDDC is not making much impact owing to obvious constraints. First is the issue of funding. Next is the ways and manner board members and other personnel are appointed. Another is political interference and worse still is the usual problem of diversion of fund.

In 2007, the Ministry of Niger Delta was established to coordinate and develop activities in the region. However, despite the presence of these bodies, the area still remains under developed. The fact remains "if the Federal Government of Nigeria cannot finish work on the East West road for over two decades now, what more do we expect from these agencies which are supposed to provide auxiliary support. As it were, Niger Delta youths are being blamed for the recent wave of violence in the region, "It is our oil and others have been taking it. As we can't beat them, we have joined them.

The Way Forward

Social injustice is unfair both in the sight of man and God. To institute a just and equitable society, the following may be considered.

- (i) Modernized roads should be constructed to reach the remote areas of the region.

- (ii) Gas flaring should be discontinued in keeping with internationally acceptable standard.
- (iii) Cases of environmental pollution should be treated with dispatch in keeping with international best practices.
- (iv) The land use act should be abrogated. Oil companies should negotiate directly with their host communities and only pay tax to the federal government.
- (v) Displaced communities should be treated with dignity, taking into cognizance their cultural identity.
- (vi) Manufacturing industries should be set up to offer employment to the youths.
- (vii) The proposed University of environmental studies Ogoni should commence without delay.
- (viii) Specialized health facilities should be established to attend to those oil exploration induced diseases.

Conclusion

The Niger Delta region has contributed so much to the development of the Nigerian economy. Naturally, it is supposed to get something commensurate. The simple meaning of social justice according to scholars, is that, “The same contribution, equals the same benefits”. They opine that a person’s benefit should equal his or her contribution. Through the struggle for resource control and agitation for a healthy environment, the indigenes of the Niger Delta continues to appeal to the conscience of the global community as they are dying in the mixt of plenty. The paper therefore, wish to conclude in the words of Ademoyega (1981) -- “A revolution do not always have to be bloody, or cataclysmic. They could be peaceful and continuous”.

Applying the above to the issues raised by Habakkuk (Hab. 1:1-4), it is obvious that injustice in whatever form, breeds disaffection and peaches individuals and groups against one another. A situation where people offer so much and get so little does not make for a harmonious society. Oppression and suppression can last for a long time but not forever. To ensure harmony in any society, the people must cultivate the spirit of give and take. They should be able to carry everyone along as they attend to their individual and collective needs. Here, the socio-economic and political theories which served as the structural framework for this study, will help us to appreciate the discussion better.

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