

# Ph.D. Thesis Evaluation Report

Thesis Title: *Human Security and the Culture of Youth Violence in Nigeria*

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Reviewer: PhDr. Kateřina Werkman, Ph.D.

In his dissertation, Kingsley Emeka Ezemenaka sets out „to investigate the complex situation surrounding human security and youth violence in Nigeria.”

It is evident throughout the thesis that the author was motivated to explore the topic by deep personal interest for the issues at hand. Driven by his commitment to provide a policy relevant study of youth violence and its implications for human security in Nigeria, he has undoubtedly put together a large volume of information about youth violence in Nigeria and based it on an extensive literature base. Particularly appreciated is the wealth of academic sources by African researchers that informed the study.

But there are also serious perils to such ‘engaged’ research, and unfortunately, the presented thesis suffers from a number of serious shortcomings in its theoretical, methodological and empirical frameworks.

Firstly, the stated research problem and questions derived from it are extremely broad. In the introduction, the author formulates the following questions:

*“What are the causes of youth violence in Nigeria?”*

*“What are the implications of youth violence in Nigeria? which “seeks to investigate if youth violence contributes to insecurity of the state and how it can be managed if does” (meaning in fact rather two further subquestions).*

*“What are the solutions to curb youth violence in Nigeria?” which seeks to proffer solutions to curb youth violence”.*

Each of these questions, or even a section thereof, would have probably sufficed for a relevant and in-depth PhD thesis. An attempt to tackle them all at once results in a relatively superficial and not a particularly systematic analysis. In addition, there are other agendas the thesis attempts to address that are not even specified in the research questions, such as *“defining the relationships of youth violence and human security in Nigeria”* (p.14) or the application of the (adjusted) model of the relative deprivation theory, all of which further broaden the scope of the research.

I have a number of serious reservations to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the dissertation:

The key concepts used in the study are discussed in the first chapters, others (like unemployment, resource-based violence or ethnicity) are only cursorily touched upon in the later chapters or not really at all – but none of them is truly operationalized, that is, formulated in terms of measurable factors specifically for the purpose of the study.

The concept of human security and its relationship to youth violence is just broadly stated within the limits of the obvious, but what are we really looking for in terms of linking these two specifically in Nigerian context is not clear. The author states there is *“ambiguous information concerning the relationship between youth violence and human security in Nigeria”* (p.14) and sets out to *“clarify”* it, but no framework for such process of clarification is outlined. So questions remain: Is youth violence a threat to human security in

Nigeria? Or is lack of human security a cause of youth violence? Or is this a cyclical relationship? Do both the failure of human security to “find footing” in Nigeria and the youth violence have the same cause? None of this is addressed.

Even the arguably central concept, “youth violence” remains poorly defined. Despite a discussion in the section ‘*Youth violence in Nigeria*’, it is unclear what the thesis understands under “youth violence”. Does it include regular criminal activities such as violent thefts and robberies? Drug crime? Sexual violence? Is the study concerned with individual cases of violence committed by people that fit within the youth category? Or is it focused on crime that involves youth as a “group”, such as vigilante groups, radicalised/terrorist groups etc.? All of these are mentioned in passing but it is never made clear what exactly constitutes “youth violence” for the purpose of the present thesis. Moreover, when results of the survey are presented, most attention is given to the responders’ participation in PROTESTS that are “*mostly, seen as a precursor to violent conflict if not properly addressed*” (p.102) thus including into the research also “potential violence” not just the actual violence.

The thesis abounds in categorical statements on the causes of violence even before the questionnaires and datasets are analysed. For example, in the introductory section on youth violence the author claims (p.58) that “*the prevailing violence that is commonly witnessed in Nigeria is as a result of violence resulting from cultist activities. Other factors or causes of youth violence such as electoral or political violence are seasonal and takes place when there is election, same goes with religious violence and resource based violence (emphasis added).*” What are these claims based on? What are the “seasons” for religious/resource based violence, what brings them about?

In the theoretical framework, the author comes up with his own “*adjusted model of youth violence grievances and rebellion in Nigeria*” (p.76) which makes a number of interesting modifications and amendments to the existing RD models with regard to Nigerian realities. Yet again, he does not follow through with clearly defining and operationalizing the variables or using the theory to create a structured research framework for further analysis. I would expect that the proposed model would be systematically tested on the empirical data in order to confirm or dismiss its validity, but it is not. It is referred to in the “*Discussion*” section of the thesis as “*Theoretical linkage with fieldwork findings*” (p.106) but it is more of an ex post facto matching some of the findings with some of the tenets of the theory, mostly not even the author’s own model but the original Gurr’s statements. In the end, it is not clear what purpose does the relative deprivation theory serve in the thesis.

There are also issues with the method of data gathering. One is the lack of information on the sources and characteristics of the data gathering platforms. It is for example unclear, which online fora were used for spreading the questionnaire for the survey - it is unclear what kind of people are active on those fora, for what purpose they join those fora (social/friendship, professional, etc.) Furthermore, a sample questionnaire should have been attached as an annex to the thesis, particularly as the text itself gives away very little about the type, number and direction of the questions that were asked. From what is presented in the paper, the survey does not seem to have enquired about the two issues that the thesis itself refers throughout to as the most significant causes of violence - unemployment and cultism.

For the data featured in Fig. 5 (p.107) - “*For people engaging in youth violence what do you think are the most likely causes?*” - were the answer options limited to issues outlined by the author of the questionnaire (judging by the absence of “other” category)? Did respondents have the chance to write additional comments? Were the categories further specified beyond the one “eg.” example stated in the brackets? Where would, for example, ethnicity or cultism

as potential causes of youth violence fall into, and would the respondents clearly understand that? There is “all of the above” column; does it mean that none of the respondents chose just two or three of the options?

The same goes for Fig.4 (p.103): looking at the answers for the question on reasons to engage in protests, the information given about the potential reasons is slim – respondents may not always be sure if the reason they have in mind would fit the political, economic or resource based category as in reality, these often overlap.

The author also admits that some of the interviewees did not understand concepts such as “human security”, how much guidance on its meaning were they given in the online survey? It is also quite unclear to me, how a question on whether someone participated in a protest and what motivated them relates to the research aim of identifying causes of violence. Does the answer to the question allow making any conclusions about violence? I would argue that it does not. All the more, arguably, because even when protests turn violent (as is proposed in the thesis), those who stir the violence may have different reasons for participating (causes, motivations, whatever you name it) than many among the non-violent protesters.

Contrary to what the author claims, there is no strong triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data, each of the data sources are presented separately. This problem is compounded by the already mentioned absence of clearly operationalized concepts and a structured research framework. Each of the data sources uses its own “variables” or terminology, we cannot be sure ethnic or political or economic causes mean the same in the different places they come up in. The quantitative analysis yields results on categories of youth violence rather than causes, the survey is more about the respondents’ perception of causes rather than the causes and the few face-to-face interviews with people from experts to uneducated youth generate patchy answers not amenable to any generalization.

Throughout the analysis as well as in the conclusion, different causes are emphasised as the most important, significant etc. What the conclusions eventually come down to is a claim, that youth violence in Nigeria has many different causes. Which is hardly a novel discovery; rather it is just a confirmation of what was already known from the introduction.

There are also shortcomings in the formal presentation of the thesis, such as grammar and spelling mistakes, and in paraphrasing.

Overall, my impression is one of a lost opportunity. The author clearly has a deep understanding of the issues he is writing about. By far the most elaborate discussion in the thesis is on cultism as a growing security problem linked to youth violence. Had the thesis focused on this particular issue in depth rather than attempting the broadest analysis of all causes, implications and solutions to youth violence as a whole, its contribution could have been more significant. I do nonetheless recommend the thesis of Kingsley Emeka Ezemenaka for defense.