The roaming threats: The security dimension related to the mobility of the Almajirai in Nigeria and its implications for Africa's regional security

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Abstract

The culture of children begging for alms in Northern Nigeria is long-established and is propelled by poverty, 'parentlessness', the absence of parental care and, most importantly, the Islamic doctrines of 'giving' to children who are made to seek for qur'anic education outside their parents' homes. The prevalence of these 'almajirai' in Northern Nigeria has begun to create new security dimensions as a result of their mobility given the context of their recruitment into terrorist sects such as Boko Haram and ISWAP. Almajirai have also indulged in drug addiction, street pickpocketing, and other urban crimes. Their mobility has constituted threats for transmission of dangerous communicable diseases such as Corona Virus-19 or what is known as COVID-19. This paper examines the non-military security dimensions associated with the mobility of wandering children beggars or what are often regarded as the Almajiris in Nigeria's northern states. It examines the level of security threat that the Almajirai pose to the Nigerian state and what implications their mobility has for Nigeria's internal security, especially in the age of international migration and globalisation. Further, the article analyses the dynamic ways in which the mobility of the Almajiris has threatened the security of the neighbouring states of Chad and Niger as well as West Africa's regional security in general given its proximity and socio-cultural linkages. The paper employed secondary sources of data collection. It concludes that the mobility of Almajirai poses serious internal security challenges for Nigeria as it serves as a fertile ground for terrorist breeding and radicalization. Disease contraction and transmission, urban crimes such as car-hijacking tactics, pickpocketing, and criminal surveillance of potential innocent targets have become associated with their mobility; hence, regional security is endangered as a result of their increasing crossing of the loosely guarded Nigerian border to the Lake Chad area and West Africa.

Keywords:

roaming threat, security dimension, almajirai, mobility, Africa's regional security

Introduction

The sovereign composition of the Nigerian states is made up of thirty-six (36) constitutionally recognized states. With the historical trajectory of colonial amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914 (Eric, 2016, p. 2), the cultural character of northern Nigeria kept pace with its customs and religious preferences. Each of these thirty-six states has rich cultures and religious beliefs that transcend the sociological and historical disposition within their states. Northern Nigeria comprises nineteen states with over sixty percent of the Nigerian population awarded to it. The heartland of northern Nigeria is solidly dedicated to Islamic culture. This has influenced the socio-agents in respective states in terms of education (what is taught; not necessarily formal education), economic specialization (the type of trade and commerce practiced), politics and leadership, and patterns of social relations over the years.

With a Muslim population in the north of about 80%, child education, especially knowledge of Islam, is considered core. In this region, children seek Islamic knowledge in several madrasas (Islamic schools where children are taught). The culture of nurturing children with Islamic knowledge outside the parent's homes is referred to as almajiranci. The male gender that seeks this knowledge outside his parents' home is regarded as almajiris[1] while female gender is regarded as almajira. Also, the plural word for almajiris is thus regarded as almajirai. Characteristically, *almajiris* usually a small child is expected to stay with an Islamic scholar to build knowledge and, in some cases, devote maximum servitude and apprenticeship towards the words and teachings of such a scholar. In return, the Islamic scholar (mallam-Islamic Cleric) is expected to feed and cater to all almajirai's need until he's 'becoming youth' (Aluaigba, 2009; Awofeso, Ritchie and Degeling, 2003). However, recent events in northern Nigeria suggest that the system (almajiranci) is facing critical challenges, in particular, the adaptation of the welfare of the old system to a modern generation. Added to this, sociological factors, such as family collapse and bad economic governance in northern Nigeria, have worsened almajirai's welfare conditions from their mallams (Olagunju, 2012). Importantly, the art of street begging by almajirai due to socio-economic and political changes, have brought to the fore security concerns around their mobility and what this means for Africa's regional security architecture. This becomes a relevant security issue given the precarious history of street children and young people in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and their role in violence and crisis (Kaplan, 1994, p. 1; Vigh, 2006). Arguably, poor governance and bad economic policies, such as the structural adjustment programme of the mid-1980s, affected family structures with multilayered implications for young people whose hopes were dashed (O'Brien, 1996). As noted by Diouf (2003) and Gore and Pratten (2003), tackling the root cause of despondency through counter-actionable governance helps halt the social behaviour that is capable of unleashing further mayhem on the citizenry and state, given the non-committed parasitic elites in charge of the post-colonial states that Ake (1996) describes as no different to the colonial state. The Alamjirai are an example of bad governance in the fragile northern Nigeria (Ekpon, 2017). The implications of the mobility of almajirai are even more important given what some scholars have ascribed to parasitic elitism (Hansen, 2016), especially in a society where "expendable category" and a "war machine" are prevalent (Chabal, 2005; Lewis, 2004; Maclay and Özerdem, 2010; Ukiwo, 2002). Existing studies on almajirai have mainly focused on the educational formations and terrorism within the state's failed arguments. What is missing in those studies is how the mobility of these almajirai has become a salient non-military security concern within national boundaries as well as regional security architecture. This is the central objective of this paper. The paper is structured into six sections. This includes an introduction and a sub-section detailing the conceptual clarifications of almajiris, mobility and security. This is closely followed by an overview of the system, almajiranci, in northern Nigeria.

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1. Almajiris is the singular verb for a male gender child who goes outside his parents' home for the purpose of acquiring Islamic knowledge. The female gender indulged in this act is regarded as almajira while the plural is almajirai. The system of children leaving their homes for qur'anic knowledge is thus regarded as almajiranci.

The third section deals with poverty and development in northern Nigeria; the dearth of good governance and parasitic elites. The fourth section analyses the quest for survival: almajirai's mobility and non-military security threats. The fifth section focuses on the almajirai's internal and regional mobility: trans-national security challenges in the context of historical and socio-cultural affiliation. The study found out that almajirai's mobility has evolved a dynamic non-military security threats to Nigeria and regional states. Domestically, it has opened up a blister of ethnic-tensions and politics of ethnic stereotyping. Their mobility has raised fundamental questions on issue of ethnic relevance and nepotism with implications for nation building. More so, almajirai have evolved into urban criminalssuch as pick pocketers, car-hijackers, criminal surveillance. Their vulnerability has endeared them into kidnapped targets and terrorist recruits especially for ISWAP and Boko Haram with implications for regional security architecture. More so, their mobility has become attached with deadly contraction and transmission of communicable diseases such as COVID-19.The results section of the study is closely followed by a final section devoted to the conclusion of the study.

Conceptual Framework

This section deals with the operationalisation of the major concepts of the paper. Concepts such as almajiri, mobility and security are clarified within the study.

Almajirai

The concept 'almajirai' has been studied by political scientists, sociologists, cultural and religious scholars in different ways. Despite not having a unified definition for the term, there are commonalities within the operationalisation of what an almajiri is in social science literature. The term is derived from an Arabicword "al-Muhajirun" (Hansen 2016, p. 2). Almajirai refers to emigrants who seeks Islamic knowledge outside his or her parent's home for a certain time. In this context, an almajiri (singular) is certainly well catered for, in terms of where a child goes, its role in the society and what knowledge is expected from them in the society (Hoechner, 2018). The cultural interpretation of the term has mutated from the almajiranci–the system of seeking Islamic knowledge for children at such tender age outside their parents' homes. It has included modification of children seeking for qur'anic knowledge and those characteristically fending for themselves by collecting alms on the streets. Contemporary features associated with almajiri in present Nigeria recognizes the social and economic changes that are pertinent to describing who an almajiri is in Northern Nigeria. Almajirai (plural) refers to children, often between five and fourteenare sent to a *mallam,* or to Islamic scholars so that they are not distracted from a qur'anic education and its principles. They are Islamic seekers of knowledge whose moral and qur'anic education is meant to be used in upholding societal values in Northern Nigeria (Aghedo and Eke, 2013, p. 8). Children like these are found in similar countries of west Africa such as Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso where a sizeable Muslim population can be found.

Hansen (2016) notes that almajirai are those children (mostly young boys and girls) who flood the streets of northern cities in their millions to attend traditional Muslim schools under the tutelage of a *malam*—a teacher who is an Islamic scholar. Hansen notes, however, that not all almajirai are street beggars (Hansen, 2016). Nevertheless, the proportion of those who beg for alms is much higher and representative of why they are now seen as street beggars or Islamic kids fending for themselves. Hence, the 'urchinization' of the kids and the associated stereotype by many social scientists (Hansen, 2016). Hansen (2016) further notes the exceptionality of their characterization as "ragamuffin boys and girls, obviously, between four and five years old seeking Islamic or religious

knowledge but who have been burdened to beg for alms for both their food and the lesson fees charged by *mallams* with the hope of gaining reward in the after-life and after a diligent service to humanity within the states' moral institutions. Hoechner (2018), in her counter-misrepresentation of whom an almajiri is, submits something contrary to the stereotypical representation of scruffy-looking boys littering the street with dirty clothes and begging bowls who were sent out to grasp an Islamic education or qur'anic depth away from the comfort of their homes. She notes that almajirai are children who have taken on the burden of becoming 'resourceful members of society in the light of the morals and religious principles of northern Nigeria (Hoechner, 2018). Almajirai are therefore morally molded children upholding the moral fibre of a cultural state or region rather than the loosely 'panic threat' stereotype ascribed to them because they have no Western education (Cohen, 1972, pp. xxvi–xxvii). What is more assuring is that the original identity of almajirai has been transformed due to socio-economic, cultural and political factors. Therefore, almajirai as operationalized within the study are those young children who are outside their parents' home but with a mallam and most seen with bowls on the streets begging for alms for their livelihood and often attending qur'anic education under the tutelage of a mallam. This fits into Aghedo and Eke's (2013) and Hansen's (2016) conceptualization of who almajirai are and the nature of their identity in northern Nigeria.

Mobility

Movement pertaining to human beings has been extensively studied in the literature of migration (Adey, 2010; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Castles and Miller, 1993; Huysmans, 1998, 2006; Huysmans and Squire, 2009; Sassen, 1996; Soysal, 1994). Movement requires a temporal shift from one location to another. Movement is however hinged on pull and push factors, a situation which is most often conditioned by economic, cultural and political circumstances. Mobility entails a microcosm of migration literature often involving human access to a particular place at a given time. Mobility refers to the movements of people and the access to such freedom within the social, economic, environmental and political context. It also involves the 'motility' of a human being(s) individually or as a group to effectively explore spaces (Collard, 2015, p. 6). Since mobility involves both human and non-human transiting a particular place at a particular time (Sheller and Urry, 2006), people, objects, practices, and information thus become engaging agents of mobility (Sheller, 2008; Vozyanov, 2014). The growing literature on mobility continues to be framed within the context of its security nexus (Huysmans and Squire, 2009). Mobility as a discipline has therefore espoused the non-securitized flows of human beings or mobile agents; hence, movements that have been taken for granted are at the centre of threat analysis and how best to guard them (Beauchamps *et al.*, 2017, p. 6; Huysmans, 2006). It is important to reconfigure the informal relationships of a given people and how mobility restructure social lives (Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2006, 2010; Sheller and Urry, 2006). The implications of movements must therefore be thoroughly analysed within the purview of whose movements, what its threats levels are and what regulations are required that might enhance agents of mobility without creating panic emotions. By looking at what is 'fixed' or 'mobile' (Huysmans, 1998), mobility studies are concerned about drawing our attention to what we formerly take for granted concerning movements of subjects and objects (Beauchamps *et al.*, 2017, p. 6). Consequently, the innocence and contradictions of free movement (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 210), which Cresswell (2010, p. 20) considered as 'political' in forms of 'disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility' for others, must be critically analysed.

The mobility of the almajiri therefore reflects the fluidity with which children who have gone to seek Islamic knowledge under a mallam traverse the rural-urban and cross-country spaces. Almajirai are renowned for wandering and loitering. They are seen almost

everywhere in the northern part of Nigeria as noted by Hansen (2016) and Shehu (2015). Their identity has been couched around their frequent migration to where their bowls are 'better buttered' to receive some naira and food (Hoechner, 2018). The fact that their daily encounters and especially livelihood are shaped by such movements has further led to a reconceptualization of who they are and the implications of their mobility within the context of urban governance and security. Mobility has therefore turned into a critical security topic as a result of violent extremism and an upsurge in terrorism since the Boko Haram transformation. Their motility along national and international borders has been staggering, with resultant implications for communities and society linkages (Collard, 2015). Thus, mobility needs to be factored into national security policymaking and analysis (Koslowski, 1998) in the same way that migration has been framed in post-1989 security given undocumented movements of people (Kaplan, 1994) to urban crime, and global terrorism associated with people across the world (Walters, 2006, p. 199). Essentially, there are more reasons to unlock the political narratives of 'dangerous mobilities' (Walters, 2006, p. 199). The mobility aspect of security must relate to questions of who or what moves and the origins and destinations of the moving object (Huysmans and Squire, 2009). Consequently, the almajirai's mobility-security nexus must be properly analysed from a non-military dimension for state and human security.

Security

The discipline of security studies undertook an inward shift in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall and the iron curtain (Baldwin, 1995, p. 3; Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2017, p. 241; Freedman, 1998). The notion of a hard power conception of security which had been dominantly influenced by realists during the Cold War saw a more complex dimension forming of what (in)security entails beyond military power. The human security dimension of what threats and absent threats meant for national and international peace and security became clearer. Social science disciplines such as political science and international relations began to theorize the human-related insecurities and the implications for the contemporary political system (Buzan, 1984; Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998). One of the major areas introduced is the security dimensions of human migration-cross border movements of people and the flow of transnational threats (Heisbourg 1991; International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 1991; Loescher, 1992; Vernez 1996; Widgren, 1990). The post-Cold War theorizing thus began to emphasize the human challenges that threaten the existence of nation states rather than the usual inter-war conflicts that characterise the 1914 to 1989 era. Importantly, security studies have largely been dominated by a Eurocentric lens prior to the evolution of human security. Africa was methodologically and epistemologically brushed aside to an irrelevant corner until cross-border analysis on security began to highlight the nature of threats emanating through the movement of people. Hence, the thin line between what is national and international has been exposed as highly misleading and one which must be grasped using a multi-layered approach. Security has therefore involved threats posed by human and non-human sources and existential threats to the corporate sovereignty and national prosperity of a state or international society. Mobility securitization has been deemed to have influenced policy outcomes and vice versa in the contemporary globalisation (Castles, 2003; Loescher, 1992; Vernez 1996; Weiner, 1992/1993; 1995). Understanding security in the contemporary political system goes beyond 'hard security' or military confrontation (Ibeanu, 2002). This is because security challenges are gradually diffusing from leaders of nation states. Monocausal arguments continue to be challenged by other alternative narratives, especially individual networks and other subliminal groups. In light of this, movements of terrorists, or transnational mobilities of crime, have come to the fore by challenging foreign borders and undermining national security architecture in many states. More importantly, human mobility has become a new source of threats manifest-

ing in non-traditional forms, whereas international migration has induced policy crises and reaction to the sphere of security studies (e.g. Heisbourg, 1991; IISS, 1991; Loescher, 1992; Widgren, 1990). Yet the security dimension concerning internal and regional human mobility with children has not been systematically investigated using Nigerian case studies such as those on the almajirai.

An Overview of the Almajiri System in Northern Nigeria

The culture of parents or guardians sending children at a tender age to a mallam (scholar) to gain Islamic or qur'anic knowledge is known as almajiranci and was established as early as the 16th Century in Africa. It flourished in the old Kanen-Bornu empire which included present northern Nigeria, and, or, the Lake Chad area; and extended from northeastern Nigeria to the northwest including the northern cities of Sokoto and Kano. Almajiranci or the often-regarded almajiri system involves organized emir(ate) authority support through funding for the grooming of future societal religious leaders for children in madrasas. In northern Nigeria, the almajiri system flourished before the colonial (British) conquest (Aghedo and Eke, 2013; Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014). It served as organized structures for learning and imbibing characters defined as 'agreeably acceptable' as a constructivist will argue (Nicholson-Crotty and Kenneth, 2005). Almajirai also contributed to the official workforce of the pre-colonial state (Hansen, 2016). Their considerable numbers often support the economy in the form of small businesses and artisanalskilled workers (Hansen, 2016). They also act as local judicial members of a decentralized Emir's cabinet in terms of dispute resolution using Islamic knowledge (Aghedo and Eke, 2013).

This famous system thrived in post-independent Nigeria despite the lack of colonial support it had suffered. The British administrators discarded it as a non-educational enterprise (Hoechner, 2011).The British did not find it useful for administrative convenience. Since colonialism requires some level of literacy and record-keeping, the system was simply discarded for its pointless value in numeric and scientific terms. The withdrawal of the British colonial state's support eroded the financial support system that made it orderly. This became more so after the Emirs had been conquered; although they were retained in some form because of British interest in indirect rule. The north, however, had been consolidated Islamically and since indirect rule did not disrupt religious structures, the almajiri system was still viewed by local and traditional actors, especially in families, as a moral social asset useful in societal governance. Consequently, local mallam (Islamic scholars) took the responsibility of continuing the qur'anic school system despite the paucity of funds. Northern Nigeria in post-independent Nigeria, however, made no changes regarding the almajiri system's management by the ruling government in terms of finances. Nevertheless, the expedient of 'harvesting' votes and political support made the government give tacit recognition for the system as a valuable custom to achieve its political ends. The politics of election left the system untouched. So instead of being scrapped, it was used for moral and cultural issues. Traditional structures in northern Nigeria, albeit handicapped by colonial reconfiguration as a passive and non-influential agent in governance, shouldered the cost, finances and societal mobilisation of the almajiri system until recent decades started to show waning trends.

Furthermore, of all the democratic structures pivotal to cornering political capital in northern Nigeria, religion-infused traditional settings stand out. Islamic religious structures represent a solid political bloc that commands respect and followership in northern Nigeria. It is this agent of the society that decides a huge chunk of what happens in politics and the economy (Obadare, 2018). It is not surprising that in the wake of flour-

ishing western education in southern Nigeria, the elites, in fear of cultural diffusion and religious decline, quickly agreed to sharia law in 2002 (Obadare, 2018). Sharia laws have been part of constitutional provisions in the Nigerian constitution. Sections 275 (1) and 38 (1) of the 1999 Constitution (Government of Nigeria, 2011, p. 257) provided for sharia laws as a template for governance and justice. However, as development continued to elude the region,poverty indices continue to soar, while traditional authority became more fatigued financially in providing necessary support for the almajiri system. The World Bank (2020) notes that Nigeria is one of the most poverty-stricken countries in the world (The World Bank, 2020). Statistical analysis suggests that 46.7 % of Nigeria is an extremely poor nation and one with over 86 million poor coming next after India (Quartz Africa, 2018). Nigeria also became the poverty capital of the world in 2018 (Business Day, 2019; Quartz Africa, 2018). Moreover, northern Nigeria is estimated to be harbouring the largest chunk of poverty indices with unemployment estimated as 57% of the 23 million total (Quartz Africa, 2018). The consequences of this retrogressive developmental plan in northern Nigeria continue to make old scars turn into fresh wounds with its attendant socio-economic implications. Ake (1996) notes the abandoning of governance in most of Africa's society. To Ake (1996), governance is never in the heart of post-colonial rulers. Democracy and development only served as a means to capture power (Ake, 1996). This has been a major trait in Africa's post-colonial society. Mbembe (2001) agrees with this notion in his post-colonial analysis on how good governance has been exchanged for political power and control. What matters to Northern Nigerian governors is the access to federal resources and the power that accomplishes being in the ruling order; hence, governance and development are only an occasional electoral campaign strategy to perpetuate oneself as legitimate representative. Such narratives reflect on the developmental discourse about northern Nigeria's over 20 million of out-of-school children (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2018), the majority of whom are almajirai.

The 1980 brought with it the weakness in the capacity of traditional and religious institutions to respond to issues on economy and politics. The 1980s ushered in the Washington Consensus (Structural Adjustment Programmes 'SAPs') on developing countries. Its impact on Africa was holistic. This impact on the sociological and economic livelihood of almajirai. SAP rendered African society fragile (Ghai, 1991; Olukoshi, 1996). The prescribed neoliberal model reduced the income of citizens and 'roll back the states' policies took over the economy. SAP pressures therefore increased vulnerabilities (Olukoshi, 1996) and homes became more economically fragile. Parenting pressures doubled-up. Having some sort of livelihood became a herculean task while misery and hardship surged. Children were recorded suffering nutritional issues in Northern Nigeria far exceeding that of the south. By implication, communal support for the almajiri system became exposed to its gloomy era due to a lack of necessary economic support.

Momentarily, mallams who were custodians of the almajirai began to charge money for their services, and maintenance of the system, (Aghedo and Eke, 2013; Shehu, 2015). Almajirai were therefore encouraged to beg for alms for their livelihood and charge fees (Hansen, 2016). Alms begging was preached as a dignified thing to do rather than indulge in crimes. Almajirai's societal acceptance began to wane amid endemic poverty and parentlessness patterns in northern Nigeria. Kids littered the streets looking hungry, ragamuffin-like, begging for alms from people with money in strategic areas of the cities and public institutions of the elites (Hansen, 2016). Almajirai consequently fended for themselves as the 'new normal'. It is from this point that almajirai took on the negative image of street beggars, urchins, dirty and unkempt kids who may go without a bath for weeks. It is at this condescending level that almajirai became tapped by

socio-political, religious and economic exploiters for uncharitable acts including sexual exploitation, crime, terrorism and political thuggery (Aluaigba, 2009).

Furthermore, while the system's decadence left so much to desire with the lack of appropriate policy intervention for more than 20 million kids, it remains baffling that due to political backlash in the strongly religious society, concrete measures weren't taken despite misgivings about the system[2] (Garba, 1996). Dr. Aliyu once addressed the issue while serving as the Chairman of the Nigerian Governor's Forum. He stressed that:

The system of almajiri served a good purpose in the past (…) But we have passed that stage now. We have now reached a situation with respect to almajiri where we have to be 'wicked' in order to be good to ourselves. We must say 'NO' to this system and then work out how to integrate them (almajirai) properly. (Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014, p. 25)

The result is that non-military security dimensions associated with almajirai social mobility and interaction began spreading wildly with the tendency to inflame internal security as well as African (west and central) regional architecture. This is because governance has been abandoned by northern elites for politicking. Necessary governmental character has all but disappeared. The future of the children is left in jeopardyas they are (un)consciously lacking in skill or formal education for their emancipation (Garba, 1996). Nevertheless, it is the parasitic elitism and level of political manipulation that has festered and given almajirai new roles as the dangerous new precariat class (Standing, 2011) with their attendant roaming non-military threat. Northern political elites showed no concerns about their training, welfare and were ruminating on how to subject these 'bleak future' kids to 'political harvesting. Although the contrast is that the elites send their children to school and empower them, but continue to use other children for their political ends or their hatchet jobs. Almajirai have become part of the rigging elements (European Union [EU], 2015; Punch, 2018b). With weaponised poverty and the sharing of some naira for electoral manipulation during election, the ineligibility issues relating to almajirai is brushed aside for the purpose of political harvesting. This becomes more touching when an understanding of poverty and development in the region is analysed in relation to governance by the elites.

Poverty and Development in Northern Nigeria: The Dearth of Good Governance and Parasitic Elites

Northern Nigeria has not witnessed the expected development for almost five decades. Developmental growth has been stalled. The north has become a 'poverty hub' in Nigerian developmental discourse. Its popular states of Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto have struggled economically to thrive, unlike Lagos, Enugu and Port Harcourt. What is more bemusing is the rate at which socio-economic indices in terms of education, health, and security have reversed drastically, unlike in the 1950s. The 1950s in northern Nigeria witnessed visible projects and appreciable socio-economic growth. Agriculture was booming; education was increasingly extending to the illiterate. Roads and other forms of human development index points were positively returned after auditing. However, today, this is not the case, the north is backward to cite a prominent northerner, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who was a former vice president of Nigeria (Daily Post, 2017). The north is characterized with tipping indices of fragility vulnerabilities (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018). Education has witnessed relegation (Hamza, 2009). UNICEF (2018) states that northern Nigeria houses more than half of out-of-school children to the tune of 13 million in its 2018 reports. It must be added that public schools (Western institutions) have been tagged a thing of reproach. The Almajiri system, despite being regarded as non-educative institutions by

UNICEF, continues to soar despite its challenges (Hamza, 2009). Reports of discovered torture chambers in Kano, Katsina in 2019 showed the level of rottenness in the age-long celebrated institution (Hansen, 2016). Yet the system still appeals to their religious and traditional elites despite its obvious ills (Awofeso, Ritchie and Degeling, 2003; Oladosu, 2012). Unemployment, on the other hand, is high. With menial jobs[3], child poverty and labour in the form of street hawking of sugarcane, sachet water, oil and fruits have become staples. The young in the north are mostly unemployable officially due to the lack of formal education and skillset (Hamza, 2009). These pervasive socio-economic challenges have warranted national discourses and initiatives but have yielded no tangible results. Importantly, children are not left out. Almajiri is gradually developing into a common stereotype. What is missing is the paucity of good governance by the political elites. Northern elites prefer to stay in power using democracy and development as rhetoric as long as it massages their egos and ensures the incentivization of the patronage system. Implementing industrial policies or sound inclusive governance that will deepen poverty eradication while hastening development has become a weaponized phenomenon. Poverty and development had become a means to an end (Daily Trust, 2020). The end being, to be in power and have access to the national purse to draw resources. This explains the northern elites' nonchalance to poverty alleviation and other sectoral governance. The lack of socio-economic growth has increased the fragility for vulnerability of youths; hence, they see the state as callous. An account of the nature of the African states as a wicked institution developmentally not-concerned and indifferent to the colonial states is exemplified as observed by Ake (1982, p. 141). Insecurity arising from poverty and manipulated religious groups has led to a rise in youth involvement in violent extremism (Club de Madrid, 2017; Galeazzi et al., 2017; Mercy Corps, 2016; Obajeun, 2016; Oxfam, 2016; Royal United Services Institute, 2015; United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2018). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD; 2018) states that one of the key drivers of violent extremism in northern Nigeria remains the twin issues of poverty and underdevelopment. Livelihood challenges breed extremism amongst young people in northern Nigeria. This particular trend is becoming a new challenge for street children or almajirai.

Furthermore, the northern political elites' parasitic governance approach has contributed to the under-exploitation of human and natural resources endowed to the region. Although Nigeria remains an oil-rich African producing state, its economic and revenue allocation shared monthly amongst the component states continues to prove insufficient to stir growth. The federally received income has caused a deep, lazy consumer economy in states. Rather than developing local economies at the state level, reliance on shared monthly petrodollar receipts has become a mainstay of most federating states (Aduloju and Okwechime, 2016; Ibeanu, 2002, 2001; Ikelegbe, 2010, 2005; Iwilade, 2019; Obi, 2010a, 2010b; Okwechime, 2018; Onuoha, 2005; Ukeje 2001) with the north lacking the fundamental developmental plans of the South as posited by the former Emir of Kano States, Lamido Sanusi (Punch, 2017; The Cable, 2020a). Moreover, reliance on revenue allocation from Abuja has created a lack of healthy economic competition for growth and development with serious consequences for poverty in concerned states. Furthermore, political elites have also weaponized poverty, education and security. Poverty has been integrated as one perfect strategy for clinging to power. It is used in national electoral bargaining at the federal levels, with much emphasis on who gets what and when; while using poverty as a campaign yardstick despite a lack of concrete developmental plans. Development has eluded the region and its youth and children paying for bad governance with endemic poverty. Vote buying as acknowledged by the US in the 2019 election also represent another dimension of weaponized poverty (Bratton, 2008; Lucky, 2014; Premium Times, 2019). Underage allegations in electoral petitions have become recurrent charges in judicial appeals (EU, 2015; Punch,

3. Menial jobs in this context refers to jobs like non-formal types of jobs or unskilled related work. It entails works akin to hard labour or skillset such as cobbling, fetching water, construction labour, etc.

2018b). Attempts to restructure have been fiercely resisted by northern elites as long as power is at the centre of northern kinsmen. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's Confederation Report's recommendation was dubbed political and quickly ended in the trash bin in the coming of a northern successor. The attempt in most northern states to create jobs and reduce poverty can be reduced to temporary and insufficiently unappealing (Daily Post, 2018). Poverty reduction empowerment takes the form of wheelbarrow and cobblers' tool kits (Punch, 2018a; The Whistler, 2018), leaves much to be desired. Tangible skill acquisition and empowerment and formal or Western education continue to be an illusion. The elites certainly enjoy the illiteracy as it helps to harvest the teeming numbers who can rarely be critical analytically beyond their primordial inclinations. The 120 new almajirai schools provided by the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan had been abandoned as anti-cultural and rebasing (Yaqub and Nasarawa, 2018). Consequently, young people and children are at the mercy of politicians or the political elites in these manipulative schemes. This continuing reality amidst wanton corruption has impacted on the children from northern Nigeria, especially the almajirai. Poverty has increased the socio-economic challenges in the society, consequently affecting peoples' capacity to give substantially to these wandering kids. Parentlessness has increased under the guise of Islamic learning (Oladosu, 2012; Yaqub and Nasarawa, 2018). Child hunger has increased, yet the culture of street begging for alms by almajirai has not reduced, which helps forge the stereotype of northern kids. One of the implications of poverty is that almajirai thrive at the mercy of the alms giver, which is not certain in any area, and consequently suffer abuses in their act of 'bowl carrying beggary' (Reuben Abati, 2020). The politics of poverty and the dearth of socio-economic driven development make reliance on the patronage system from the Federal Government allocation a staple as noted by former Emir Sanusi Lamido (Punch, 2017). Consequently, there are a huge number of children littering the street, traversing places for survival of the next day. These children beggars go through hardship and security challenges in getting their daily needs. Their movements also come with security concerns. The next section will analyse the consequences of almajirai's mobility and the security dimensions attached to it.

In Search of Survival: The Almajirai's Mobility and Non-Military Security Threats

One common feature peculiar to almajirai is casual mobility. Moving from one place to another barefoot while begging for alms has become negatively attached to the image of what are essentially qur'anic knowledge seekers. With their dirty clothes, morally biting chorused songs used in appealing for food and money to tidy themselves up, they provide a despicable example of child poverty (Hoechner, 2011). ActionAid (2011, p. 7) notes how child poverty in northern Nigeria constitutes a national and regional concern. UNICEF's (2020) account suggests that almajirai mobility results in negative exposure to social vices by violent groups and elements and the children in their millions are confronted with daily abuse. Alms begging has therefore increasingly become a source of concern for security issues associated with it. Almajirai social realities are manifested in three ways in their individual and collective relations. These include urban crimessuch as car hijacking, pick-pocketing, criminal surveillance and criminal informants. The second being terrorist breeding and radicalization and the third manifesting itself as deadly disease contraction and transmission. In Kano and Sokoto, reports of almajiri operating as street thugs and informants have been proven (Cable News Network [CNN], 2010; Ehrhardt, 2016; Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigeria, 2015, p. 6). In city areas with bush and no security surveillance, property ransom has become prevalent to the extent that the government has deployed police to bushy areas.

Rape and sexual harassment are also new security challenges ascribed to almajirai mobility (Hoechner, 2018). Waiting in strategic commercial areas such as at automated cash machines (ATMs) causes a feeling of discomfort for customers' withdrawing cash despite security guard constantly chasing them (almajirai) away. The fact that they work as informants for street touts and armed robbers (Ehrhardt, 2016) unsettles a cash withdrawing customer. Paradoxically, while the central idea about the religious and morally molded identity in several madrasas is supposed to instill Islamic and cultural discipline (Shehu, 2015), growing evidence points on the contrary to an almajirai character disposition that flags up potential security issues. The United Nations Populations Fund's (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2016) documentation of gender-based violence in northern Nigeria suggests that the phenomena are prevalent because of active insurgency, banditry and spousal abuse, as well as increasing rape and sexual harassment cases relating to street louts and children. The latter involves the active participation and victimhood of the almajirai. This is caused by their innocent search for food or sources of livelihood. The Northeast is currently the hotspot of violent related gender-based violence due to the Boko Haram activities (The World Bank, 2019; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020). Girls Not Brides (2018) and Save the Children Alliance (2003) posit that Northern Nigeria's gender-based violence defiles specific community locations or hotspots. Perpetrators are constantly looking for preys and are aided possibly as a result of the fluid mobility of criminal wandering about, a situation that includes almajirai children (UNHCR, 2019, p. 9). In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), due to the almajiri's migration through lorries and a shared culture and language (predominantly Hausa-Fulani), similar trend has caught the attention of the authorities to the extent of involving radio jingles for sensitization. For instance, Armed Forces Radio F.M. (Frequency Modulation), Brekete Radio and Human Rights Radios have all placed advertorial jingles relating to street urchin security threats. Additionally, car-hijacking, stealing and other social vices have also attracted attention.

Almajirai are also 'kids' groups with drug addiction. They inhale toilet sewages and soakaways[4] (waste pipes) ostensibly to "drug-up" (Tribune, 2018). Drug accessibility in northern Nigeria is stifled under Sharia laws which prohibits drugs as contraband. Efostic gum or glue sniffing (Healthline, 2018; *Voice of America* [VOA], 2013), Tramadol, and the infamous Codeine Cough Syrup, as documented by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC; 2018) in northern Nigeria in 2018are some of the signs of growing drug addiction patterns involving almajiri. The implications are that children exposed to drugs, hemp and other social vices are potential replacements for political thugs, arsonists, killers and terrorist sects. This becomes complex given the region's ideological susceptibility to Boko Haram's recruitment and the nature of social realities and the fragility levels in northern Nigeria. This combination of negative exposure exemplifies a perfect breeding ground for violent extremism as indicated by empirical studies (Ekpon, 2017; USIP, 2018). Repentant Boko Haram confessions and extended family relatives' testimonies suggest that almajirai are becoming Boko Haram's new recruits (Brechenmacher, 2019; Club de Madrid, 2017).

Another dimension of national and regional security posed by almajirai mobility is their vulnerable access to kidnappings by terrorist groups. HumAngle, a media outlet with a strong background in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region notes in some of its 2020 reports, that Boko Haram's new leadership has been redefined as a result of child terrorist considerations. In one of its reports (HumAngle, 2019, 2020a), it notes how Boko Haram's new fighters are dominated by kids and that this is impacting its strategic operational commands because children cannot cover as much ground as adult would do aside lacking knowledge of city areas. The report further highlights that kids' terrorists works with older members of the network to attack other areas of the region. But that

4. *'Soakaway' are toilet sewage tanks for excretion disposal and management in buildings or homes. These toilet tanks contain faeces with chemical substances capable of intoxication. These pipes or tank holes are opened and sniffed to ostensibly drug-up by adults addicted to 'highness' in northern Nigeria. This practice has been observed with almajirai as a result of their access to many sewage tanks given their mobility and inadequate parental care. This is created by the ban on alcohol in northern Nigeria as a result of Sharia Laws. Alternatively, northern youth who are drug addicts' resort to either pharmaceutical drug abuse and alternatives such as shoe-gum sniffing or the so-called potent sewage emitting excreted pipes and tanks.*

they suffer retreating agility of an adult, hence; Boko Haram and ISWAP's operations have been restricted to the outskirt of Borno State so as to cover their physical fitness weakness for the meantime. By implications, this impact on Boko Haram and ISWAP's attacking formation to go beyond Borno State in carrying out its attacks on other northern states in Nigeria (HumAngle, 2020b). Children involvement in violent act has been demonstrated with the example of the Liberian civil wars (Gore and Pratten, 2003; Haer, 2019; Haer and Böhmelt, 2016). It is therefore not a matter of misplaced concern to see almajirai as critical elements of recruitment given their features (Brechenmacher, 2019). Firstly, almajirai have clear or good knowledge of Islam, which is the fundamental notion on which Boko Haram and ISWAP peddle their insurgency (Campbell, 2013). Secondly, their level of poverty and impoverishment is so fragile that children are easily swayed to do anything for their survival. Hansen (2016) recounts in his study while interviewing Imam Dauda Bello that the vulnerabilities of the almajirai and ex-almajirai create fertile ground for recruiting terrorists from Northern Nigeria into violent extremist groups. According to Imam Ballo almajirai:

have no job opportunities after graduating from almajiri school. You are unemployed, you are poor and you have no means of survival. This makes them easy targets of Boko Haram (…) When they (Boko Haram) came to Mubi they (the `Yan Daba) would be given money; 5,000, 10,000 naira. The moment they see money (sic), they get interested. They join. (Hansen, 2016, p. 88)

Poverty cannot be explained as the only factor for being a violent extremist recruit in his study on fragility and extremism. Ideology and other religious inclinations play a crucial part. However, such positions on how poverty and extreme hopelessness inspire insurgent recruitment cannot be ruled out given the nature of the fragility index as argued by Putzel (2010) in his study. Hoechner (2014, p. 64) differs saying that such analysis is too monocausal given its attribution on economic rationality. Nevertheless, one cannot under-estimate such factors. The fact that most of the street children have been brutalized and tortured makes it possible to recruit them into terrorism. Again, their tender age makes it possible that they don't know 'right' from 'wrong'. Child innocence is exploited gruesomely (Higazi, 2015) by terrorist groups; consequently, becoming a national security concern coupled with rampant terrorist child kidnappings by Boko Haram. The lack of parental care and unguarded mobility, therefore, threaten the peaceful existence of the country due to terrorist exploitation. Child suicide bombings litter the Nigerian Boko Haram insurgency (Aghedo and Eke, 2013; Higazi, 2015). This reinforces the vulnerabilities of wandering children in areas where radicalism is considered fertile. Living as an almajiri is a life full of strive and difficulty. UNICEF (2020) documents the feeling of a thirteen-years-old boy Abdukarim, a former almajiri who had been taken from the street after the relocation crisis and responses from northern states governors during the COVID-19 lockdown. According to Abdulkarim:

…life as an Almajiriwas very tough…I had to fend for myself, watch over myself, be my own security, and beg to support myself. I never enjoyed being an Almajiri because the system exposes one to so many dangers and it is very difficult (UNICEF, 2020).

Abdulkarim's mentioning of danger exposure reinforces why their mobility and way of life constitute non-military threat.

In addition, the almajiri constitute a security threat in today's Nigeria and its neighbours due to their susceptibility to contracting and transmitting deadly diseases. Although almajirai were not the focus of disease transmission before the outbreak of COVID-19 in February 2020 in Nigeria. The drama that ensued during the federally declared lockdown where they kept wandering for food alerted northern governors who had been

looking for ways to improve their public image (Vanguard, 2020b). Kaduna state, for instance, suggested that the challenges of the almajiri system were 'long dead' (Hansen, 2016). Their discovery as carriers of the COVID-19 virus was one the security challenges associated with their mobility in an age of increased migration and deglobalization after test results. For instance, of the tested numbers (418) in Kano, 192 had the virus (Nwozor *et al.*, 2020; The Cable, 2020b). It is evident that such contraction could not be traced to the finite numbers as they are constantly walking about while transmitting deadly diseases within their state as well as traversing neighbouring states. Almajirai mobility and the susceptibility to contracting and transmitting viruses therefore resonates with Wolfer's theory of 'presence and absence insecurity'. As the virus and other transferrable diseases spread through the street urchins, state economies and the human population are endangered. This constitutes a new dimension of an absence of threat but a presence of insecurity as a result of almajirai mobility.

In addendum, most northern Nigerians uphold their religious maxim of giving to the poor. Since almajirai also receive cash or items, it is difficult tracking the contacts of those who have contracted deadly diseases from almajirai. This critical non-military security issue posed by almajirai mobility within Nigeria and outside (Chad or West Africa) must be promptly addressed. Failure to adequately address such mobility creates internal and regional security implications for Nigeria and Africa given the contiguous neighborhood and borderland porosity. Border governance is even exacerbated by the ECOWAS framework (Akinyemi and Aduloju, 2017), as well as historical and socio-cultural linkages between Nigeria and other countries (Afolayan, 2000; Afolayan, Egunjobi and Ikwuyatum, 2010; Asiwaju, 1984, 1989, 1996, 2003). The regional dynamics are therefore significant as almajirai social networks stretch beyond Nigeria.

Implications of Internal or Regional Mobility' of Almajirai: Trans-National Security Challenges in the Context of Historical and Socio-Cultural Affiliation

There is growing evidence of the migration of almajirai into other parts of Nigeria. This is enhanced by historical, legal, socio-economic as well as cultural factors. Legally, the Nigerian 1999 Constitution guarantees the movement of citizens and residents within the geographical territory as long as it is not a threat to national security. Chapter 4, Section 41 enshrines these rights (Government of Nigeria, 2011) and almajirai are Nigerians without doubt. Historical and cultural affiliations with other Islamic networks have intensified the crisscrossing movement. Mobility patterns generating security issues explain the action of the state government repatriating almajirai during the Covid-19 lockdown. Despite movement being restricted by the government, it was shocking that there was a 'two-way' movement in the North by almajirai. Subsequent medical test results showed several infected children. Almajirai social assets of shared Hausa language and people across other states of the federation contributed to their inter-state movements. The 'Sabo' connection and social network across these states made its internal migration possible. Significantly, the century has been marked by fluid social and human mobility at both the local and international levels (Huysmans and Squire, 2009; Sheller, 2008; Squire, 2011; Urry, 2007). Globalisation has decentralized opportunities. Northern almajirai are gradually getting tired of living in the region given the reports of better economic livelihoods in southern part of Nigeria from their social networks. Social network therefore means that mobility challenges are reduced internally. The experiences of successful migrants to the southern part of Nigeria boost the morale of almajirai for trying out new opportunities. Consequently, socio-economic challenges coupled with

historical and cultural linkages enable mobility (Sheller, 2008). It is not surprising that even in south-western Nigeria, made up largely of those of the Yoruba race and cosmopolitan, almajirai are now found on streets with bowls and their ragamuffin identity (Hansen, 2016). A similar trend could be observed in the Middle Belt even during the COVID-19 lock down across the federation. Consequently, prompting the Middle Belt leaders to raise alarm of ethnic dimension to movements during the COVID-19 lockdown (Vanguard, 2020a).

The implication of this mobility is the transference of the inherent non-military security threat to other states. This in no small measure threatens the internal security architecture of the federating units. Firstly, they are Nigerians and have the right to live anywhere in the country. Secondly, they become a source of additional cost for states in terms of clearing them off the streets and subsequent rehabilitation. This is akin to the transfer of responsibility and one that is in a continuum given the growing pattern of inter-state migration. Overall, their movement is burdensome. The almajirai were seen as far away as Cross River recently, allegedly transported into the states until the presiding governor had to reject a truck load of these children (Vanguard, 2020a). The Niger Delta militants warned of their presence within their region as unacceptable and unwelcome during the pandemic crisis (*Muslim World View*, 2020; *The Nation*, 2020; Vanguard, 2020a). The politics in the non-military security dimension is huge given their ethnic background, Hausa-Fulani. Hausa-Fulani are a core ruling elite in Nigeria. Handling such matters requires tact and finesse. Ethnic violence in far-South is not new to the Nigeria security institutions. The recent Ife (Yoruba) and Hausa crisis in 2017 reinforces this point (Premium Times, 2017; Vanguard, 2017). The core issue about the Middle Belt and the farmer-herder crisis in North Central is linked to ethnic and tribal rivalry (International Crisis Group, 2018; The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes [ACCORD], 2018). The implications are that managing this sensitive issue of mobility and non-military threat raises other ethnonational politics in Nigeria. The internal or component state security,thus becomes 'higher politics.

The movement of almajirai is not restricted within Nigeria. The system's historical survey stretched far back to the old Kanen-Bornu Empire, covering the present Lake Chad area where pastoralists and Hausa-Fulani cultural affinities are sociologically active. A similar system also thrives in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia and Sierra Leone. Consequently, there are existing social links to draw on in case of migration. Cross-border movements between Nigeria and its bordering countries is one of the security porosity issues confronting Nigeria since its independence (Afolayan, 2000; Afolayan, Egunjobi and Ikwuyatum, 2010; Asiwaju, 2010). In Chad, almajirai typed children also exist. Nigeria's porous border has been a source of security challenges for almost five decades due to borderland economy, socio-cultural and historical exchanges (Oshita, 2010). The porosity of these borders has led to unmanned aerial vehicles or drones being used. President Muhammadu Buhari's administration had directed the immigration authorities to employ drones for effective security of the large expanse of land (BBC, 2019; *The Nation*, 2019). Institutions such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission and National Boundary Commission have all contributed to the organizational and technical capacities (Asiwaju, 2010) towards the effective manning of the border areas. Yet border governance continues to witness transboundary crimes and insecurity (Aluede, 2017; Bassey and Oshita, 2010, p. xiv) which have led to several closures of the border (Akinyemi and Aduloju, 2017). As noted by Bassey and Oshita (2010, p. xiv), border security issues have manifested themselves in ways that both international and local actors have been able to identify the dynamic complex problem interwoven into governance and mobility. This position critiques Goertz and Diehl (1992) as well as Vasquez's (1993) emphasis on inter-states territorial disputes as the fulcrum of security threat against the state. That

is, beyond inter-state territorial conflicts along the border areas, almajirai's mobility is capable of increasing security concerns such as crime and terrorism between and within states they traverse. Keohane and Nye's (1971) security alarm on border governance and management therefore become a critical lens forillustrating almajirai mobility within and outside the country and an almajiri therefore represents a trans-national actor capable of shattering regional security arrangements by their mobility. This constitutes an additional security challenge for the African Union and Economic Community of West African States that have had to grapple with other forms of security governance within their jurisdictional responsibilities (Bassey and Oshita, 2010, p. 27).

Conclusion

The paper examined the nature of almajirai mobility in Nigeria. It revealed that the almajirai system has considerable relevance in the contemporary global order. This is linked to how it breeds child poverty and other socio-economic and political set-backs for children. While it highlights the moral and religious conviction behind the age-long system, it also draws attention to its battered condition due to weak funding as far back as the colonial era. A situation that had been exacerbated by structural adjustment programmes on the part of supporting mallam and the economically suffocating traditional system. The consequence of this has been the encouragement of alms begging and child mobility across northern Nigeria. It is this mobility and the search for livelihood and money that has exposed the children to various inimical societal hazards. Vices such as crime, torture, exploitation, gender-based violence, terrorist recruiting and drug addiction trump other advantages that their mobility brings them. Moreover, the almajiri system had proven uneconomically viable as a form of education in the contemporary global economy and has led to breeding unemployable youth in fragile and ideologically extremist recruiting zones.

Furthermore, the paper revealed that addressing the associated security concerns arising from almajirai mobility is not only sensitive to the internal political order if one considers their strong ethnic background. However, it showed that their inter-state migration as part of guaranteed constitutional-rights increases ethnonationalism and is capable of creating internal implosion for a unity-seeking country. This mobility does not only constitute a threat to Nigeria alone. The almajirai's socio-cultural and historical connections put Chad, the Economic Community of Central African States as well as West Africa by their porous border in jeopardy given their international migration pattern. By implication, a greater security burden is shoved onto the shoulders of African Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and, their mobility uniquely threatens Africa's security architecture. The roaming threat from almajirai deserves painstaking actions. Governance must be revisited on the parasitic elites in Northern Nigeria. Abandoned almajirai schools built by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan must be judiciously put to use for the masses of children in northern Nigeria, while a more rehabilitative syllabus must be drawn up to tackle their deficit knowledge. Laws mandating their formal education should be pushed within the ambit of rights rather than as a choice. Tackling these children's needs and their reckless and stereotypical mobility through conscientious schooling will help nurse these dream-filled children to be useful for Nigeria and Africa in a continent that wants to leave no one behind by 2030 and will address their subtle non-military security challenges.

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