Human Nature and Violence: Is There Relationship? a Theoretical Exploration

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Abstract

This study interrogates the nexus between human nature and violence. The study adopted qualitative reseat method in its investigation. Relying on the utility of secondary data and application of reiterative analytical technique, the study affirms a strong correlation between human nature and violence. It argues that violent is innate in all animals and since human beings are descendants of animal species they, too, must naturally **exhibit** *violent behaviour in their interactions with their fellow beings. It is tin's natural tendency that accounts for the violence experienced in human society.*

Key words: Human Nature; violence; Relationship; theoretical and Exploration

Introduction

Understanding the nexus between human nature and violence has remained the source of sustained inquiry and endless debates among scholars. The plethora of studies carried on this phenomenon has produced divergent and conflicting reports that obfuscate and compound our understanding of the subject matter. This stems from the multi-disciplinary nature of conflict studies and the fluid nature of conflict as a concept. Ademola (2007) observes, Conflict is a fluid and infinitely elastic concept which can be twisted into different shapes and has become an issue over which scholars are in sharp disagreement with their colleagues.

Despite apparent lack of synergy among scholars over what particular aspects of human nature that factors violence, they share a common consensus that there is correlation between human nature and violence. Scholars contend that violence is innate in all social interactions, among all animals including human beings. This view is broad in coverage, incorporating realist scholars and other scholars with biological, physiological, psychological and even theological backgrounds. The logic is that our ancestors (animals) were instinctively violent and since we evolved from them, we too must bear destructive impulse in our genetic makeup. Scholars have

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stressed that human beings are animals, albeit higher species of animals, and would naturally fight over that they cherish.

Early account on this aspect knowledge was documented by Thomas Hot in his book titled "The Leviathan". Hobbes traced the vulnerability of man to violent to inner nature. He observed that man is naturally violent. He further buttressed that man naturally selfish, egoistic and wicked which concluded predisposes man to violent behaviour. Tracing the genesis of man's violent behaviour he avers that man initially lived in state of naturewhich was characterized by endless struggle that most times ended in violent deaths. He remarks that life in the state of nature was war for against all and the only widely acknowledge virtue was; kill whom you can and take whatyou can. In the exact words of Hobbes. state of nature was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish,and short"

Since the convocation of this master piece by Hobbes, more scholars have continued to offer explanations on the subject matter. Van Creveld (1991) wrote "however unpalatable fact may be, the real reason why we have wars is that men naturally like fighting, and women those men who are prepared to fight on behalf." This implies that wars depend on aggressiveness of individuals.

Despite the richness of the literature this area of study, the knowledge is scattered in studies carried out in separate disciplines and sub-disciplines. There have been no enough efforts towards aggregating and integrating these studies into single whole where the knowledge could be easily accessible to scholars who may need them. As such scholars were constrained to scout for these views in studies of different disciplines and sub-disciplines whenever the need for the knowledge arises. As such scholars are compelled to undertake the strain of reading through arrays of literature from different fields and sub-fields as such accessing the knowledge have become an uphill task. It is against this backdrop and need to overcome the challenges posed thereof that this study attempts to make this modest contribution. This paper therefore attempts to aggregate and integrate the knowledge on studies concerning the matter from diverse disciplines into coherent whole.

Human Nature and Violence: A Theoretical Discourse

There is litany of theoretical conjectures in the literature that offer explanations on the nexus between human nature and violence conflicts. There are some scholars that argue that violence is innate in man. This view is broad in coverage, incorporating realist scholars and other scholars with biological, physiological, psychological and theological backgrounds. The first strand of these scholars hinged their argument on biological ground. The scholars contend that conflict is innate in all social interactions, among all animals including human beings (Isard, 1992; Weeks, 1992). The proposition of this school is that human beings are evil by nature and as such would always create opportunities to express the evil tendency in them. The thinking is that since our ancestors (animals) were instinctively violent beings, and since we evolved from them, we too must bear destructive impulse in our genetic makeup. Put differently, the theory argues that human beings are animals, albeit higher species of animals, and would fight naturally over things they cherish. In their assessment of human nature, theorists like Hobbes, St. Augustine, Malthus, and Freud expressed the belief that human beings are driven by a natural instinct to self-

preservation (Shedrack; 2006). Relying on the measurement and analysis of animal studies, classical genetics asserts that inbred lines reared in similar environments often differ in aggressiveness, and that the differences can be enhanced by selective breeding (Lagerspetz&Lagerspetz, 1971; Manning, 1989). Modern techniques permit the genes involved to be identified (Maxson, 1996). In human beings, studies on twins have shown that genetic factors are important for differences in anti-social behaviour, including aggression, especially when it is associated with early-onset and pervasive hyperactivity (Rutter, Giller&Hagell, 1998). But it cannot be assumed, from a relation between a genetic difference and the incidence of aggression, that the genetic difference affects aggression directly: overt aggression is a long way from gene action. Furthermore, genetic differences may affect some other propensity which affects the incidence of experiences likely to induce aggressiveness: for instance irritable babies may induce parenting of a type which enhances the likelihood that they will develop an aggressive temperament. Genetic differences may affect some other propensity which affects the likelihood of aggressive behaviour – for instance power motivation or self-assertiveness. In any case, childhood aggressiveness is not necessarily associated with adult anti-social behaviour, other than when it is pronounced and associated with other symptoms, such as hyperactivity and peer rejection (Pulkkinen, 1998).

There are, of course, other biological factors which affect aggressiveness. In at least the great majority of countries, males are more physically aggressive than females. The incidence of violent acts tends to increase with age, reaching a peak in the late teens or early twenties, and then to decline (Blumstein et al., 1988). And such factors as hypoglycaemia, stress, drugs, and some forms of psychopathology may be associated with aggressiveness (Segall, 1989).

The second strand of the literature takes a theological view of this phenomenon. St. Augustine, (1948:141) and Neirbuhr, (19953:47), and some other theologians referred to the linkage between violent behaviour and original sin in humanity. St. Augustine attributes violent behaviour to inner flaw in humankind by way of sin that brings forth bitterness, violence and conflict. The whole purpose of religion according to him is to regulate this sinful nature in the relationship between men and men on the one hand, and men and God on the other hand.

The third strand of the literature takes a psychological view on this phenomenon. This set of theories links human vulnerability to violence to psychological make-up of man. Emphasizing on natural instinct of man, Neirbuhr, in (Ademola, 2007:56) asserts that humans are driven by a natural quest 'will-to-live'/'will-topower' to seek power, personal security and survival at the expense of others around them. In other words, it is believed that conflict is inherent in man, and this can be explained from man's inner will properties and attributes-hormonal composition. That aggressive instinct will be provoked when man is threatened and challenged, etc.

In his attempt to understand the high level of aggression and destruction that occurred during World War I, Sigmund Freud, in Ademola, (2007:84), looks to human nature for answers. Similarly, tracing violence to human nature, a psychologist, Shindi in Utume, (n.d: 17) identifies violence with aggressive individuals who are psychopathic. According to him, psychopaths tend to act aggressively because they have no conscience and so have no time to weigh the consequences of their actions. He attributed this development to chromosomal anomalies in the

genetic makeup of such individuals. A normal person, male or female, will manifest xy type chromosomes. But abnormal cases are xyy and xxy for male and female respectively. These tend to be unusually aggressive, with xyy type being more common than the xxy type, comparatively" (Utume, n.d:23). This is a psychological explanation of instinctive aggression.

The fourth strand of the literature attributes human aggressiveness and destructive tendencies to physiological factor. This set of explanations describes the destructive tendencies in human beings as a product of a 'dialectical struggle' between the instinct associated with life and survival *(Eros)* and the instinct associated with death *(Thanatos)* and suggested that societies had to learn to control the expression of both the life and death instincts. In his view, both instincts are always seeking release and it is the one that wins the contest of domination that is released. Thus, aggression against others is released whenever the *Eros* overcomes the *Thanatos* and as he puts it, war and conflict is a necessary periodic release that helps men preserve themselves by diverting their destructive tendencies to others.

Sentiments like those expressed above probably inform the thinking of many people who argue that failure to express anger results in heart diseases, stress, and high blood pressure. In support of this view point, Zinberg and Fellman, went as far as providing a justification for periodic military confrontations suggesting that war serves to discharge the aggressive instinct and that "a mature society…must eventually accept violence as i-essential part of human nature, essential not because it is good or bad, but because it there." (Zinberg and Fellman, 19967:540).

The fifth strand of the literature has realist view of this phenomenon. This set literature attributes human tendencies to violent behaviours to flaw arising from selfish nature. Because of this tendency, Hobbes described life in the 'state of nature' as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." Following these view points, realists highlight inherency of conflict in human society and trace the root of conflict to a flaw in human nature which is seen to be selfish and engaging in pursuit of personalized self interest defined as power. The theory believes that "competitive processes" between actors primarily defined as states, is the natural expression of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competitive interest (Duetsch, 1973:26). This theory has three sub-orientations viz: Descriptive Realism which the world as an arena of conflict; Explanatory Realism which seeks to show that there genetic defects which push humankind behaving negatively (Koestler,1967:116) and that wars become inevitable because there is no mechanism to stop them from occurring (Walt, 1959:232); prescriptive realism builds on the arguments of Descriptive and Explanatory Realisms to say that decision makers, individuals, groups or nations have a moral justification to defend their basic interests and ensure self preservation using any means necessary.

In his thesis on 'power politics' in Politics Among Nations, Morgenthau, (1973:4), argues that imperfection in the world, namely; conflict, has its root in forces inherent in human nature; that human nature is self, individualistic and naturally conflictive; states will always pursue their national interest will defined as power, and that such interest come into conflict with those of others leading to inevitability of conflict. He further advised actors to prepare to deal with the outcome and consequences of conflict since it is inevitable.

A host of studies unanimously testify that there is a strong relationship human nature and violence conflicts (Loeb &Hay, 1997). Much of these researches focused on the family concomitants of aggression. In the West, where two parent nuclear families are the norm, disruption in parenting is strongly associated with subsequent aggressiveness. The studies particularly maintain that aspects of child-rearing strategies are related to aggression in the child—for instance, insecure and especially disorganized attachment, parental coldness and permissiveness, inconsistent punishment and power-assertive disciplinary practices have negative implications on child's behaviour (Coie and Dodge, 1998; Martin, 1975; McCord, 1988; Rothbart & Bates, 1998). Baumrind (1971) found that children of authoritarian (high parental control and low warmth) and permissive (low control) parents were more aggressive than those of authoritative (sensitive control and moderate-high warmth) ones (see also Hinde, Tamplin and Barrett, 1993)3. The effects of punishment are complex: the child learns that aggression can have negative consequences, but also suffers pain that induces aggression and observes that the parent is behaving aggressively.

Other studies have examined the processes whereby family interaction patterns influence the development of aggressiveness. Classical conditioning, operant conditioning and observational learning have all been implicated. The learning processes may involve cognitive intermediaries including the decoding of cues, their interpretation, and the attribution of motives (Berkowitz, 1993; Dodge, 1982). The dynamics must differ between two and one-parent families, and between nuclear and extended families, but the basic principles are likely to be similar.

In addition, individuals outside the family may serve as role models, and the peer group may be an important source of influence -peer-rejection is also a concomitant of aggressiveness. Aggressive individuals often hold generally positive views about aggression and believe it is socially normative: this may be a post hoc rationalization of their own conduct (Coie& Dodge, 1998). In turn, the role of family members and outsiders is influenced by the nature, values and norms of the society in which they live. In some cultures aggressive behaviour is encouraged, in others harmonious relationships are valued, and in yet others harmonious relations with the in-group, but hostility to outsiders, is the norm. Such norms may differ between boys and girls, firstborns and later borns, between social classes, and so on. Where individuals or groups see themselves to be in danger of being exploited, they tend to cultivate an image of toughness and irritability. Such a situation was found in the frontier regions of the United States of America in the nineteenth century, and in many modern cities (Pruitt, 1989; Archer & Gartner, 1984).

Poverty, and especially income differential, is strongly related to aggressiveness within and across societies and probably operates through disruption of parenting and fear of exploitation (Gartner, 1977; see Miller &Jacobson). Aggression can also arise from a need for a sense of self-efficacy: when aggression is associated with enhanced self-efficacy, the aggression becomes self-reinforcing.

The mass media both reflect and create societal norms, and most studies show a consistent but not necessarily strong link between televised violence and the viewers' aggressive tendencies. Although the link is not strong in an unselected population, it is probable that media violence increases tendencies for aggression in individuals who are at risk for aggressiveness for other

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reasons, such as inadequate parenting and familial violence (Pulkkinen, 1996). The data also indicate that exposure to community violence can enhance aggressiveness – implying that violence causes aggressiveness, as well as aggressiveness leading to violence (Liddell, Kemp, & Moema, 1991). Especially potent instigators of aggressiveness are video games which involve active participation in simulated violence (Anderson & Ford, 1986).

Whether or not aggression actually occurs in a given situation may be influenced by a number of situational factors. For instance, the high density of individuals in cities increases the frequency of interpersonal contacts, enhances the feeling of being crowded, and raises the emotional level (Freedman, 1975; Zimbardo, 1969). A moderate degree of arousal facilitates aggression (Zillman, 1979), as well as other types of behaviour. The design of buildings may also be an issue: some high-rise buildings may diminish the feeling of community and be associated with a feeling of alienation. Even heat and humidity may increase the likelihood of violence (Anderson & Anderson, 1984).

Conclusion

Human beings have innate tendency to exhibit violence behaviour. It is this tendency that accounts for consistent occurrence of conflicts and destructions experienced in human society. Although some extant studies have commonly agreed that there is nexus between human nature and social conflict, the explanations have their own shortcomings. Besides the difficulty of extrapolating from individual aggression to group acts of aggression, the explanations hardly suit the purpose of explaining collective violence. More than that, there is no scientific investigation which confirms that human beings are conflictive in nature. In a group study in 1986, led by John E, Mack, captioned "Service Statement of Violence," meant to address the score of the debates in conflict theory, which is the question of whether the roots of human conflict is to be found in nature (genetic) or nurture (environment). The study group affirms: That there is no scientific basis for considering human beings innately aggressive animal, inevitably committed to war on the basis of biological nature. Rather they said, war is a result of socialization and conditioning, a phenomenon of human organization, planning, and information process that plays on emotional and motivational potentialities (cited in Odoh, 2006:8).

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