

The Dynamics and Nature of Banditry in Nigeria

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Abstract

The preponderance of banditry within several nations across the globe is not new. It is a criminal act that has existed overtime, featuring diverse nature as well as unbelievable dynamics that has kept it afloat in contemporary society. It is a social crime threatening all forms of security that are encapsulated in national security. Historicizing this crime's nature and dynamics, it could be traced back to the Stone Age. However, the concept has been changing as the world evolves. This simply means that its nature and dynamics does not remain in a form but continues to be embryonic. The purpose of this paper is to x-ray the dynamics and nature of bandits in banditry in Nigeria in terms of their adaptation to various niches and their make ups in nature which gives them the confidence to perpetrate this heinous crime without any augur to humane sentiments. This work relied on secondary data from books and journals, primary information gotten first hand from arrested bandits and those still operating within the fringes of states in North-West Nigeria, thus experiential inputs were brought to bear. The paper discovered that the dynamics of bandits in banditry evolve with time depending on the environment they find themselves as well as the challenges that beset them. Their nature is such that develops radically where their demands and needs are not met overtime. To curb the dynamics and nature of this menace, this paper is of the view that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) could ensure that Nigeria's national socio-economic frameworks are citizen-centric so as to purge citizens of any illicit thoughts that may lead them to banditry or becoming bandits.

Keywords: Bandit ,Banditry, Dynamics, Nature, Nigeria, Security

Introduction

The universal view of banditry as espoused by scholars, researchers and experts unveil that it is generally a conspired act. This simply means that it is not just conducted by a person but a group of persons who waylay and attack their targeted and unobserving prey, seize their goods and most times, inflict injuries on them which could sometimes lead to the death of their victims. This was buttressed by Tamuno (1991) who posited that banditry is “the exercise of physical force, as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to persons or property”. Osaghae (1995) supported this view by positing that “all forms of banditry involve the use of force, whether it is legitimate as protagonists of the state or illegitimate as is the case when force is applied by the murderer, robber or bandit”. On several accounts, the victims are often whisked away into captivity as captives in exchange for things of value known as ransom for economic gains. On the other hand, it could be for political gains/statements where the victims are used as bargaining chips for political positions. According to Domenack (1978) banditry is:

The use of force whether overt or covert, in order to snatch from individuals or groups, something of value that they are not disposed to give of their own free will... It is also the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense especially in semi-organized groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals (Shalangwa, 2013)

Owing to the revelation above, banditry is actually the open taxonomy umbrella under which lies several organized buildups of bandits. These organizational buildups include armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgency, terrorism and so on. Each of these have not only remained enemies of the civil society but that of the nation state, subverting, sabotaging and undermining social, economic, political and national security and development as was buttressed by Sullivan (2012) who was unforgiving in positing that, “Modern day bandits are criminally inclined insurgents and conventional terrorists. They are a cog in the wheel of democratic governance and free market economy.” Each act of banditry is made up of groups of individuals who conspire to execute the act and they are known as bandits.

A bandit is an individual in banditry. He/she is often outlawed or proscribed and could be further described as a lawless marauder. Bandits live and exist in clusters known as bands. Their anchorage rests on their strong will to conspire and execute their plans to gain their goal or mission which of course, remains against the civil society and the state at large.

In Brazil, banditry lasted from 1920 to 1939 when it was quashed. Though, there were several banditry groups across the country, the most popular was the one led by Virgulino Ferreira da Silva popularly known as Lampiao who was killed along with his group in 1939. The group terrorized and invaded so many states in Brazil using high calibre weapons and knives as at that era and would often escape to the mountain areas which were their safe haven. They occupied the northeastern part of the country which is described as rugged with complex mass of ridges and mountain ranges as well as

arid climatic condition. The space is fortified and often made untenable for state forces to penetrate (Chandler, 1978).

The most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming, killing, kidnapping and wanton destruction of property (Rufa'i, 2017). The horn of Africa is made up of 8 countries which are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. This region has overtime, experienced a symmetrical connection between regional political instability, poverty and lawlessness which are appendages to banditry within the region. The region has experienced roving banditry which is in four different groups namely; Kafagne, Ngoroko, Faloul and the Shifta (Mburu, 1999). These groups of bandits freely roam the horn of Africa presenting themselves in different forms. They have been a source of wider political and security problems in a turbulent geopolitical environment in the horn, creating a deliberate and unstable national security environment which leaves much to be desired.

Banditry in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. It had existed prior to the 1980s in various forms across the country. It is a violent crime whose lethality has evolved from an old practice into organized crime conducted with immense sophistication and efficiency. It is now characterized by the use of modern weapons, accompanied by rape, armed robbery, kidnapping activities, cattle rustling, as well as organized attacks on villages and communities. Their operations are both trans-locational and transnational (Okoli & Atelhe 2014). While terrorism and insurgency are being wrestled within the North-East, the acts of kidnapping and killing of innocent people including herders/farmers clashes take its toll in the North-Central and South-Eastern regions. The South-South region has decedent groups who,

while agitating, indulge in vandalization of crude oil pipelines which are of economic importance to the state. Similar situations occur in the South-West which has experienced acts of kidnapping, assassination and wanton killings which were viewed as politically motivated. The North-West region of the country is not left out as it is bedeviled by massive banditry activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling as well as wanton killings for supremacy, power and economic gains.

Conceptualization

This paper shall be conceptualizing two variables which are bandit and banditry. The revelation of the meaning of these concepts would give clarity and indepth knowledge in the articulation of scholarly facts on the concepts.

(I) Bandits

Bandits in the society are often declared wanted (dead or alive) thus giving any member of society the license to report or kill the declared bandit with impunity. According to Manderson (2010), they are outlaws who failed to stand trial thereby becoming fugitives by the law. Hobsawn (1959) proposed the construct “social bandit” and considers them as peasant outlaws who maintain some respect within peasant society and are sometimes considered by their people as heroes, champions, avengers, fighter for justice, perhaps leaders of liberation. In any case, they are seen as men to be admired, helped and supported. Blok (1972) further added that bandits are persons regarded by the state as outlaws, but whose umbilical cord is tied to the moral order of the peasant community. Peasants therefore see bandits not as outlaws but rather as avengers. In turn, the peasants aid, admire and protect the bandits from authorities.

Watts (1987) states that Mexicans have warm regards and respect for those social workers termed 'bandits', while the state often considered them as nuisance and outlaws that need to be eradicated. He added that bandits like Chucho el Roto, Herachio Bernel and Santanon were often celebrated as heroes of Mexican independence. The bandit is seen as the people's hero, defender and saviour. Such bandits are the implacable enemies of the state and the whole social order; they are ready to die fighting against the entire civilization of the aristocratic Chinokniks and government priesthood (Mikhail 1978:65).

According to White (1981), a bandit is a person who has been forced to become an outlaw by robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. He further added that the poor state of the oppressed can functionally be attributed to the attitudes and behaviours of the rich in the society resulting to robbing the rich to pay the poor. This description portrays a bandit as someone preoccupied with seeking revenge on behalf of the maligned in the society. In agreement to this notion, Rife (2011) opines that the social bandit flaunts authority, lives with abandon and champions the causes of the masses against elite oppression. It could however be argued that instead of championing the cause of the poor, men are more likely to turn to banditry out of desperation and hard economic realities than for vague notions of righting wrongs. To Bunker and Sullivan (1998), bandits are 'gangs, criminal enterprises, insurgents or warlords who dominate social life and erode the bods of effective security and the rule of law'. In congruent to this assertions, Williams (1998) conceived bandits as transnational gangs and criminals who extend their reach and influence by co-opting individuals and organisations through bribery, coercion and intimidation; they do so in order to facilitate,

enhance or protect their own activities. Bandits in the era of globalization therefore are more than mere rural gangs and criminals.

Sullivan (2012) summarized that bandits today have the capacity to: (i) strain government capacity by overwhelming police and legal systems through sheer audacity, violence and numbers; (ii) challenge the legitimacy of the state; (iii) act as surrogate or alternative governments; (iv) dominate the informal economic sector, establishing small business and using violence and coercion to compete with legitimate business while avoiding taxes and co-opting government regulators; and (v) infiltrate police and non-governmental organizations to further their goals and in so doing, demonstrate latent political aims.

Bandits, therefore, are individuals or groups that are emerging as a serious impediment to democratic governance and sustainability around the world. They are desperate lawless marauders who get involved in illicit activities due to observed factors such as poverty, unemployment, greed, illiteracy and so on. In Nigeria, they perpetrate a lot of mayhems such as wanton killings, kidnapping, looting of crops from farmers and seizing their farmlands without recourse to the fact that their victims are poor citizens of the country. They even go as far as billing their captives as well as the farmers to pay various taxes before they are allowed access to their farms. It is common knowledge also that they install their own Emirs in raided villages and sack communities who take refuge in Internally Displaced Persons camps. This indeed makes a difference between the banditry of the old times which fought for the peasant poor as was highlighted by Watts (1987) and the bandits in banditry in Nigeria.

As much as they tend to inconvenience both poor citizens and the nation state, neither of these celebrates them. Instead they are viewed by all in Nigeria as outlaws and proscribed lawless marauders.

(ii) Banditry

Banditry has existed right from so many centuries ago. Philosophers, researchers and scholars have viewed banditry from several perspectives. While some viewed it based on their plight and vulnerability against imminent disadvantage and sufferings due to ill administration by governments, others see it from points of description of the acts carried out by bandits. Osaghae (1995) noted, however, that all forms of banditry involve the use of force, whether it is legitimate as protagonists of the state or illegitimate as is the case when force is applied by the murderer, robber or bandit. In this definition the use of force is considered a necessary element of banditry. Such force when used inflicts pains which could lead to murder, rape and all forms of destruction.

Slatta (1994) also posited that banditry involves the taking away of property by force or the threat of force, often by a group of men that usually operate in the shadows, often on the fringes of the society, in geographically isolated areas. Conklin (1992) adds that banditry is a proto-type, unprovoked and unpredictable kind of crime most feared by the public that usually involves theft with violence or threat of violence by a person with whom the victim has had no previous contact.

Acts of banditry have been perceived by different societies in different ways and should therefore be considered by identifying its essential features within specified historical contexts. Warto (2011)

defines social banditry as the act of crime committed either by the residents of a village or people in the low economic and social strata in order to fulfill their basic needs. Such acts are a response to the structural pressures, which deprive people of access to the natural resources that support their lives. Blok (1972) further added that bandits are persons regarded by the state as outlaws, but whose umbilical cord is tied to the moral order of the peasant community.

Consequently, Sullivan (2012) observed that contemporary banditry has changed in scope, nature and extent from historic antecedents. He maintains that modern day bandits are criminally inclined insurgents and conventional terrorists. He argued plausibly that these groups are a cog in the wheel of democratic governance and free market economy. To Bunker and Sullivan (1998), bandits are 'gangs, criminal enterprises, insurgents or warlords who dominate social life and erode the bods of effective security and the rule of law'. In congruent to this assertions, Williams (1998) conceived bandits as transnational gangs and criminals who extend their reach and influence by co-opting individuals and organizations through bribery, coercion and intimidation; they do so in order to facilitate, enhance or protect their own activities.

Bandits in the era of globalization, therefore, are more than mere rural gangs and criminals. The act has metamorphosed into a network, exerting strong forces on remote area and extending its tentacles to urban settings; the expansion being accompanied by increasing level of violence. The scope, dimension and operational pattern of banditry have been enlarged around the world and in Africa in particular. Mburu (1999) opines that the motive for contemporary banditry is the pauperization of people living in a

harsh physical environment. The activities of bandits are inhumane and lead to violence, causing insecurity challenges that encourage other forms of criminalities. The large scale effects of contemporary banditry cannot be justified on any ground when compared with what existed in the past. Furthermore, it is obvious that to state that contemporary law enforcement efforts have continued to find it uneasy to adequately prosecute arrested culprits due to weak presentation of evidences before the judiciary. This was one of the reasons why in Brazil in 1939, holistic decisions were taken to kinetically assault bandits that threatened the nation state during which they were all killed and beheaded as was appropriate in their laws (Okoro, 2020).

Hence, banditry is an organized crime carried out by individual(s) who by way of conspiracy resolve to invade the safety, tranquility and secure nature of a whole or part of a nation state. Their conspired resolve would often be unleashed in form of various vices such as killing, kidnapping, arson, etc preceded by infliction of terror from an environment that offers and affords them safety against being caught and prosecuted. Their infliction of terror could be determined by their level of armament, operative maneuver and inhuman treatment to their captives which could be a whole village, country or nation state, as the case may be.

Historical Account on the Nature of Bandits in Banditry

Overtime, the global environment has remained an epicentre of dangerous activities within which lies man's inhumanity to man. These activities could be traced through the periods of human existence which are the stone age, bronze age, iron age, classical era, medieval era, early modern era and modern era. Throughout these

periods, man and his environment experienced various acts of banditry and the distortion of normal human activities by bandits. The existence of bandits and their acts of banditry within these times were for all and the same purpose which were to waylay and steal, carry out theft amidst issues of assault, occasioning injuries and possibly death. Most interesting is the fact that many of these bandits were from peasant backgrounds. They used the act of banditry to fight against members of the society who were adjudged to be elite, who used their elite positions to carry out injustice against the poor or downtrodden.

It is also important to bring to fore that a bandit in the nineteenth century Europe, the Americas and Asia was a freedom fighter. His aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the down trodden from the upper class or the colonized over the colonizer (Warto, 1994). Additionally, in some pre-industrial societies, peasants see bandits differently from the state; not as outlaws, hoodlums and miscreants but as avengers and “bread winners” (Hobsbawn, 1959). They would infest the roads and rivers, ravage fields and farms, sack towns, pillage churches and torch houses in an orgy of murder. They raped women (especially those of the rich) and caused social disharmony in the affected places.

The occurrence and existence of banditry in Nigeria have presented severe trends of destructive conflicts. It has led to the unquantifiable loss of lives and property. The activities of these bandits have further placed the country under siege thereby crippling a large sphere of its socio-economic activities as posited by Ani and Nweke (2014) who described banditry as a potent national security albatross and an instrument of economic survival (Osumah and Aghedo, 2011). The

environmental values of the country which include economic forests that are supposed to be a game reserve, open savannahs, wide expanse of dense forests and various flourishing markets as well as the country's weak security systems have continued to fuel the menace of banditry. This has led to an increase in the intensity and virulence of the bandits in carrying out attacks on innocent citizens, infrastructure and even security agencies. To this, Egbejule (2018) stated that:

The bandits kill locals in communities, carry out cattle theft, abduct women and force them into slavery and seize farmlands from farmers. These deadly attacks have crippled the socio-economic development of the country by negatively impacting on investment, mining and solid material opportunities, making it unsafe for economic attraction.

This brings to fore a clear difference between the banditry of the ancient times and that of contemporary times in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Banditry of the ancient times was carried out by a group of persons who go against a system of government in favour of the poor, marginalized and socio-economically deprived. They fight against the colonizers for the colonized. They aim at emancipating and ensuring the survival of the poor; in other words, self-sacrificing for others to survive. However, bandits in Africa and Nigeria fight and deprive the poor of their socio-economic rights and abodes, kidnap them for ransom and kill them for their own gains. Their quest is aimed at personal/self-survival and possible aggrandizement. They were also possibly available tools for the elites to use at will as long

as their remunerative strength endures.

Dynamics in the Nature of Banditry

Globally, the concept of banditry has been changing over time, in space and circumstance. Its evolution is based on stimulants which ensure its growth, development and mechanization especially in recent times. The ancient times banditry was an act planned in ramshackle huts, buildings or even simple hideouts before execution. It evolved into the use of houses of sympathizers who were able to hide the bandits and keep their actions secret. Later, following the advancement of elitism, the act got remodeled into an activity whose plans were strategically coupled at the fringes of country sites, utilizing the rugged, sometimes undulating grounds as clear obstacles necessary for their maneuver and escape to safety.

There was also a change in weaponization from easy sharp objects such as stones, knives, bows/arrows and so on to gun powder, guns and pistols. This has in recent times become highly mechanized with the use of sophisticated assault rifles and high caliber ammunition. The current dynamics of banditry has resulted in the utilization of forests, deserts or a mixture of both as their den for training and launching of their onslaught. This was buttressed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2014) who unambiguously described ungoverned spaces as:

Safe havens' where bandits/terrorists/criminals plan, train and indoctrinate, secure access to weapons and equipment, have the ability to engage in illegal smuggling to generate income and derive benefits from the existence of staging grounds and transit zones.

Nature in the Dynamics of Bandits

Citizens of nations are bound by principles of citizenship and nationalism to be patriotic, disciplined and loyal to the nation state. In doing so, it is expected that they uphold nation building and security instead of destroying them. However, due to certain factors that tend to surge against the survival of citizens within a nation state, their mindset gets distracted and fixed towards survival by all means. In this wise, citizens begin to take laws into their hands and act independently towards achieving their goal of staying alive and fending for themselves. The sudden upsurge of social exclusion, social annihilation, deprivation and denial amongst others also leads to frustration which develops into aggressiveness, leading to the change of individuals from well-behaved and revered citizens to bandits. The individuals who become bandits metamorphose from acting individually into groups or clusters of criminal gangs whose efforts rave unquantifiable mayhem on both their preys and targeted environment.

Subsequent development of these bandits, who during primordial times had their acts of banditry described as traditional/rural banditry, have developed into aggravated criminal vices and activities. Their minds and thoughts become deepened in the act of banditry evolving ways of perpetrating the act. While robberies, kidnapping, armed robberies, looting, arson, maiming, wanton killing and so on were part of their developed mindset towards achieving their goals, their successes give them additional impetus and conviction to develop better strides in accomplishing their acts. This has continued to develop even in these contemporary times unto mechanized weaponry and sophistication in arms and equipment. According to Rife (2011), the social bandit flaunts authority, lives

with abandon and champions the causes of the masses against elite oppression. It could however be argued that instead of championing the cause of the poor, men are more likely to turn to banditry out of desperation and hard economic realities than for vague notions of righting wrongs.

For Bunker and Sullivan (1998), bandits are “gangs, criminal enterprises, insurgents or warlords who dominate social life and erode the bonds of effective security and the rule of law.” In congruent to these assertions, Williams (1998) conceived bandits as:

Transnational gangs and criminals who extend their reach and influence by co-opting individuals and organizations through bribery, coercion and intimidation; they do so in order to facilitate, enhance or protect their own activities. Bandits in the era of globalization therefore are more than mere rural gangs and criminals. Their acts and nature have metamorphosed into a network, exerting strong forces on remote area and extending their tentacles to urban settings; the expansion being accompanied by increasing level of violence.

The scope, dimension and operational pattern of banditry have been enlarged around the world, Africa and Nigeria particular, amongst other nations in the Sahel.

Nexus between the Dynamics and Nature of Bandits

The dynamics of banditry is subject to progressive perpetration by bandits. This means that without the transformation of the minds and thoughts of individuals into becoming bandits, there would be no dynamism in the development of banditry. The acts would remain

unfounded as the wheel to activate the act by individuals or a group of individuals would be null and void. Thus, the dynamics of banditry is directly linked and proportional to the nature of the bandits.

Way Forward

The dynamics and nature of banditry and bandits which have continued to develop over time, have done more harm than good to both citizens and their environments. It has become a menace that has continued to bedevil several nations in Africa and Nigeria in particular. To curb this, this paper is of the view that:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) could ensure that Nigeria's national socio-economic frameworks are citizen-centric. This would purge the citizens of any illicit thoughts that may lead them to banditry or becoming bandits.
2. The FGN could consider giving stringent attention to the educational sector especially in the face of continuous increase in out-of-school children as a result of the drastic upsurge of banditry in various states across the country.
3. The FGN, through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture could ensure that the forestry division of the Ministry revives forest guards so as to keep all Nigeria's forests safe. It would also be a source of employment to citizens.
4. Local government areas could create Neighbourhood Watches that could work and relate with necessary security agencies at reporting any observed traces of either bandits or acts of banditry. This would aid in nibbling the menace at the bud.

5. The FGN through the Federal Ministry of Information could organize mass social orientation and awareness campaign against the menace of citizens becoming bandits or perpetrating banditry acts. This could be done in conjunction with various state ministries of information and mass/social media.

Conclusion

It is necessary to assert that the dynamics of banditry is dependent on the nature and content of the perpetrators known as bandits. This is because the dynamism of the act is driven by the bandits' thought process into achieving desired goals and objectives. The consequences of a fostered dynamic banditry are absolute disorder and a threatened socio-economic development and national security of a nation state. This is the case in Nigeria where banditry has remained a terrible thorn in the flesh of the nation despite multi-lateral efforts to curb the menace around the country where they exist.

Suffice to mention, however, that the active nexus between the dynamics of banditry and the nature of bandits can be inactive only through positive engagement of youths by a nation state socio-economically. In this way, absolute inclusiveness is achieved while frustration and aggression are reduced to the barest minimum. Furthermore, the responsibility of the nation state at ensuring the functionality of its security agencies in collaboration with citizens as well as the reinvigoration of the forest guard system would be a germane approach to frustrating the dynamics and nature of bandits in banditry.

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