

Factors Underlying Kidnapping in Southern Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has been thrown into a quagmire by a vicious cycle manifested in different forms of criminalities. The appalling carnage perpetrated by Boko Haram in the north and the wanton mayhem unleashed by militants in the Niger Delta are typical instances. Today, kidnapping for ransom which started from the Niger Delta region has taken center stage, especially in the northern part of the country. Even though the phenomenon of kidnapping has gained traction among local and international scholars, the ethnic dimension of kidnappings, particularly in Nigeria remains largely overlooked. This paper unravels the nexus between kidnapping and ethnicity as well as other factors underlying kidnapping in Southern Taraba state Nigeria. Anchored on the queer ladder and anomie theory, the study unpacks other causal factors of kidnapping and the implications these have on the socio-economic development of the region. In doing so, the exploratory research design was adopted using key informant and in-depth interviews. The study employed purposive sampling to select 20 respondents for the study. These respondents include kidnap victims, security agents, community leaders, and members of the public within the study area. Key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were conducted among them and thematic analysis was employed in the data analysis. The study found that kidnapping is now a daily occurrence in the region and has taken an ethnic dimension. Ethnic form of kidnapping in the region is a product of the long-standing ethnic rivalries which have manifested in ethnic violence for decades among and between the various ethnic groups in the region. Other factors underlying kidnapping in the region as revealed by this study include corrupt leaders and security agents, poor forest governance, and economic and political gains. The paper recommends that to mitigate kidnapping in the region, factors underlying ethnic tensions among ethnic groups must be addressed.

Keywords: conflict, kidnapping, ethnic, violence, economic gain.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has been thrown into a quagmire by a vicious cycle manifested in different forms of criminalities. The appalling carnage perpetrated by Boko Haram in the north and the wanton mayhem unleashed by militants in the Niger Del-

ta are typical instances. Today, kidnapping for ransom which started in the Niger-Delta region has taken centre stage, especially in the northern part of the country. While the phenomenon of kidnapping has gained traction among local and international scholars, the ethnic dimension of kidnapping particularly in Nigeria remains largely overlooked. This paper, therefore, attempts to unravel the nexus between kidnapping and ethnicity in Southern Taraba state. It also unpacks other causal factors of kidnapping and the implications these have on the socio-economic development of the region. This is because in Nigeria, popular discourses only capture kidnapping from the prism of its historicity such as deprivation, marginalization, unemployment, corruption, and bad leadership with reference made mostly to the Niger-Delta region with little about other regions of the country.

Kidnapping which is a wrongful imprisonment is acknowledged as a social problem globally. This menace has become consistent in unsteady states and countries, experiencing problems of bad leadership and governance in Latin America and countries like Nigeria in Africa (Tade, Ojedokun, and Aderinto, 2019; Philips, 2011). Kidnapping can be argued to have been in existence since humans created a coordinated society that provides a coordinated attack on fellow humans (Ezemenaka, 2018). As observed by Ezeibe and Eze (2012), in its initial appearance, the occurrence of kidnapping was in the form of child abduction for ransom. Handrahan (2004) and Menon (2003) point out that the Kyrgyzstan kidnappings were carried out to solidify masculinity and strong ethnic identity while in India, Bridal kidnappings are used to reduce women's social status and the bride's negotiation power. The motives behind kidnappings are therefore mostly culture-based depending on the societies where it is perpetrated. This phenomenon has changed over the years to a complex form of criminality shaped by ethnic as well as political and economic factors.

Internal security in Nigeria which is now a mirage has helped create a platform for the perpetration of all manner of criminalities. The problem of insecurity continues to manifest itself in the form of terrorism, armed robbery, banditry, inter-ethnic violence, religious violence, and kidnapping which has now taken center stage. Kidnapping which is a problem previously unknown to the people has quickly become domesticated. The existence of oil in the Niger Delta ensured that in the last decade, the region witnessed kidnappings on a large scale and the victims were mostly oil expatriates. Today, the phenomenon has moved beyond the borders of the Niger Delta region spreading throughout the country like wildfire with the North as the epicenter (Chidi, 2014). This is succinctly captured by the Eagle Online (2017) as cited in Ogbuehi (2018) that Nigeria recorded 1177 cases of kidnappings between the years 2016 and 2017. The figure above underscores the fact that the menace is widespread; which further depicts the erosion of the security fabric of the country (Ogbuehi, 2018).

Scholarly empirical evidences abound on the causes or the motivating factors responsi-

ble for the continuous perpetration of this menace. For example, in the study of kidnappings by Badiora (2015), the author observed that contemporary kidnappings in Nigeria are attributed to resource control agitations in the Niger-Delta region. The study calls attention to the perpetration of kidnappings especially of oil expatriates because they are perceived to be the reasons the region is poorly developed. This finger kidnapping as a direct consequence of deprivation by the government which makes the people of the region strive for survival through the kidnapping of persons for economic gain (Oyewole, 2016).

To say that kidnapping is detrimental to Nigeria's national security is to state the obvious. As posited by Tade, Ojedokun, and Aderinto (2019), the prevalence of Kidnapping in Nigeria has become a threat to development, social order, and national security since the outset of a fully democratic government in 1999. It comes with economic, financial psychological, social, and physiological implications for the victims and their loved ones as well as serves as an impediment to development. The ransom sought usually comes with huge economic or financial implications (Ibrahim and Mukhtar, 2017), and the fear it causes results in the crippling of economic and social activities. Commenting on kidnapping Ogbuehi (2018:1) observed thus "No one is safe from kidnapping in Nigeria whether in the upper or lower class. Everyone is vulnerable and a potential victim". The ascendancy of kidnapping and the implications it births becomes germane for this study in a bid to unravel its trajectories in Southern Taraba which remains largely not captured in popular discourses.

Previous studies examined the phenomenon largely from the push and pull factors angle, its effects, and government efforts towards mitigating the problem in the Niger-Delta region and other parts of the country (Badiora, 2015; Obarisiagbon and Aderinto, 2018; Oyewole, 2016); and more recently the victimization experiences of the kidnapped victims (Tade, Ojedokun, and Aderinto, 2019). However, there is a dearth of literature with regard the ethnic dimensions and the consequences they herald in Southern Taraba. It is on the basis of the issues raised above that this study expands the frontiers of knowledge by examining the various factors underlying kidnapping in Southern Taraba state. The contribution of this paper is uncomplicated as it is both empirical and theoretical. The paper is divided into five sections. The first part examines kidnapping within a theoretical approach. The second part captures the methodology adopted and used for this study. The third section captures the findings that emanate from this study ending with recommendations towards forestalling the recurrence of menace in the region.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The queer ladder theory was influenced by an American sociologist, Daniel Bell (1919-2011), who coined the idea of the 'queer ladder' in an attempt to explain the instrumental essence of organized crimes as a desperate means of economic empowerment

and social climbing. The Queer ladder theory postulates that organized crime is merely a path to an end. It states that the individuals' quest and excessive greed for power leads them to a life of crime through which they hope to obtain wealth and social status in their communities. This theoretical perspective has since fertilized into a popular theoretical framework widely used in contemporary crime studies. As averred by Mallory (2007) and Okoli and Orinya (2013), the tenets of Queer Ladder theory include: (a). Organized crime is a means to an end. (b). It is an avenue for going up the ladder socio-economically. (c). It is a way of amassing wealth and gaining power. The idea of 'ladder' in 'QLT' signifies an unfortunate form of social mobility- a desperate medium of social climbing (mobility) births kidnapping. This theory aptly captures one of the reasons for kidnappings in Southern Taraba. Kidnapping in this part of the state is carried out essentially to enable the actors change their socio-economic status from the lower rungs of the ladder to the top. Through kidnapping, the kidnappers think they can come into a life of affluence. The queer ladder theory espouses kidnapping as a quick avenue for economic empowerment, which changes one's socio-economic status.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Southern Taraba state Senatorial District of Nigeria. The Local Government Areas that make up the Southern Taraba state include Ussa, Wukari, Takum, Ibi, Donga, and Yangtu Development Areas. The region has different ethnic groups spread within the Local Government areas highlighted above. The major ethnic groups include Kuteb, Wapan, Ichen, Chamba, Tiv and Kpanzun among other ethnic groups. Most of these ethnic groups are popularly referred to as the Jukuns. Other ethnic groups found in this region are Hausa, Ibo, Ogoja, Idoma, and several others. The traditional headquarters of Southern Taraba and the Jukun people is Wukari. It has an area of 4,308 km² and a population of 241,546 (according to the 2006 census). It has the Kwararafa University and the Federal University all located therein. The predominant occupations among the inhabitants of Southern Taraba state include civil service, farming, fishing and business.

The exploratory research design was adopted using qualitative methods (key informant interview and in-depth interview) in eliciting data for this study. The sample size for this research comprised groups that were either directly or indirectly affected by the cases of kidnappings within the study area. These included the direct victims, indirect victims (friends/relations), community leaders, and security personnel. These include two direct victims of kidnap, one indirect victim whose father was kidnapped, two security agents, one traditional leader, three politicians, and ten members of the communities spread in three of the six local governments that make up the senatorial district.

In all, ten In-depth Interviews (IDI) and nine Key Informant Interviews (KII) were

conducted for this study. The KII was conducted among the direct victims and Security Personnel, Politicians, and traditional leaders while the IDI was conducted among members of the general public specifically from Wukari, Takum, and Ibi LGAs. These LGAs were selected because it is reported to have registered most cases of kidnappings in Southern Taraba.

Two sampling procedures involving purposive and snowballing procedures guided this research in the selection of participants. This is because of the security situation of the state as well as the nature of the study. First, persons who have been direct victims of kidnappings were reached through snowballing. Community leaders were selected purposively because they have more knowledge of the issue under study in their communities. Since it is a security problem, hence, security personnel were selected to form part of the participants for this study.

The researchers conducted the IDIs and KIIs, moderated the interviews, and took notes. In order to record the interviews, permission from the research participants was obtained. This was to make sure that no data was misplaced. The collected data was transcribed, and the analysis was done manually. We coded such recurrent words as “collude with security,” “take bribe” and “pretend not to be aware” “buying cars and motor-cycles” “to join politics” “political cover,” “gain” and “to get rich” and collapsed them to form the theme “Corrupt Leaders and Security Agents” and kidnapping for “political and economic gain”. We coded for the theme “Nexus between ethnic violence and kidnapping in Southern Taraba from recurrent words such as “violence,” “clashes between Kuteb/Chamba, Tiv/Jukun”. These were then subjected to thematic analysis and descriptively presented.

The identities of the participants were protected during the interview session. There was no form of coercion for the respondents to participate by either the Researcher or the Research Assistant. Their participation in the study was voluntary as orally informed consent to participate in the study was sought. The goals and purpose of the research work was told to the participants as well as the importance of participating in the study. The researchers ensured that the participants were not exposed to any form of physical risk/danger. Anyone who felt he could not participate because of fear was not coerced to take part. The interview participants were also assured that the names of ethnic groups they believed were the perpetrators or victims would not be mentioned in the analysis to avoid any form of stigmatization.

RESULTS

Issues that emanated from this study formed the basis for this analysis. Therefore, the analysis from this study captures the issues and factors underlying kidnappings in Southern Taraba.

Nexus between ethnic violence and kidnappings in southern Taraba

This study found nexus between ethnic violence and kidnappings in threefold. (1). Kidnappings in this part of the state are consequences of the historical clashes between the indigenous ethnic groups which led to proliferation of arms and ethnic militias and later served as harbinger for kidnappings especially when the ethnic violence is over. (2). Ethnic skirmishes also birth a new pattern of kidnapping with ethnic undertones. (3). Kidnappings again serve as causal factor to ethnic violence.

Today, in southern Taraba ethnic violence is one of the most disturbing problems which have continued to ravage the senatorial district. In Taraba state, there are over 50 different ethnic groups with Southern Taraba accounting for over 10 ethnic groups. These ethnic differences come with schisms along political, religious, economic and cultural lines which often result in armed violence with loss of lives and properties. Takum and Wukari local government areas have suffered from this menace the most. Example of some of these violences are the Kuteb/Chamba chieftaincy tussle in Takum, the Tiv/Jukun conflict in Takum, and Wukari, the Kuteb/Tiv conflict in Takum and the Muslim/Christian violence in Wukari among others.

As a result of these clashes between and among the various ethnic groups in this region; it has brought to fore an ethnic form of kidnapping. As captured by one of the in-depth interviewees:

You see one of the causes of kidnapping in this region is ethnic differences and violence, the high circulation of hidden arms among youths leads to kidnapping (Male KII Participant, Community Leader, 59yrs).

Similarly, one of the male in-depth interview participants when asked about the causes of kidnapping in Southern Taraba observed that:

There is so much attachment to ethnicity in Southern. Taraba. Some ethnic groups feel they are not carried along politically and otherwise, therefore kidnapping of members of the perceived ethnic groups enjoying political goodies becomes a way of meting out their revenge. Land disputes among the various ethnic groups also account for the kidnappings you find in Southern Taraba (Male IDI Participant, Community Member, 34yrs Wukari).

A security agent who is one of the key informant interview participants also observed that:

There are ethnic dimensions to the menace because of the prevalence of historic clashes between the ethnic groups such as Tiv/Jukun since 1993. The kingship tussles between the ethnic groups in Takum not to forget the religious crises between

Christians and Muslims are all predisposing factors to the kidnappings recorded in the region (Male KII Participant, Security Agent, 48yrs, Takum).

By implication, the ethnic and religious crises among the ethnic groups in this region have led to the proliferation of arms. One of the implications of high illegal possession of arms among youths is the upsurge in crime and criminality. Therefore, we argue that the ascendancy of kidnappings in this region is partly a product of the proliferation of illegal possession of arms by ethnic militias. With the proliferation of arms and the high rate of poverty and unemployment experienced, the end product is increased crime and criminalities.

One of the key informant interviewees stated that:

There are many causes of kidnapping in Southern Taraba state. However, the major cause of kidnapping in this region is the long-standing ethnic and religious crisis that has led to the proliferation of weapons. During these crises, the militants plunder people's wealth and so when the conflict is over what you find is these boys using the arms for kidnappings (Male KII Participant, Security Agent, 51yrs, Wukari).

Ethnic violence does not only serve as a harbinger for the high rate of kidnappings recorded in the region but gives birth to an ethnic form of kidnapping. The myriads of conflicts in Southern Taraba brings to bear a new dimension of kidnapping with an ethnic coloration. To foreground the ethnic dimension of kidnapping in this region, key informant interviews were conducted with some of the victims of ethnic forms of kidnappings. From these interviews, it was found that some of the kidnappers do an ethnic profiling to ascertain the ethnic group of their potential victims. After the profiling, victims who do not belong to the same ethnic group as the kidnappers are abducted while those who belong to the same ethnic group with them are spared. One of the victims of kidnapping who escaped after being kidnapped recounted her experience thus:

It happened around Chanchanji-Amadu Road. Our car was stopped and then those who belong to the same ethnic group as the kidnappers were brought out of the car after they communicated in their language. Three of us, who don't belong to the same ethnic group as them, were taken inside the forest in the car. While they were taking us inside the thick forest, the guy among us managed to escape and so the kidnappers went after him after which we also escaped. We ran in different directions and later approached a compound which we used as temporary shelter, to hide from the kidnappers. While we were still in hiding, the occupants of the compound came after us with cutlasses. We ran and hid in the bush for two hours before we came out. We later got to the main road and fortunately for us we saw a police vehicle on patrol

which we stopped and they assisted us (Key Informant Female, Kidnapped Victim Student, 24yrs).

Another informant again opined that:

Kidnapping in this axis is purely on an ethnic basis because the rate at which particular ethnic group members are being targeted and kidnapped is bizarre especially those from Takum local government area of southern Taraba which has a very high record of kidnapping and murder of the kidnappers' victims. Kidnapping activity in the area is more or less a planned and sponsored activity by some people who don't like the presence of a particular ethnic group whose members are those that are mostly abducted and murdered (Male Community Leader, Takum, 42yrs).

This ethnically motivated pattern of kidnapping in Southern Taraba which is not captured in popular narratives is further corroborated by the opinion of another in-depth interviewee:

Kidnapping in Southern Taraba is geared towards a specific ethnic group which is a result of a series of communal crisis that occurred in the area. Most time the victims are murdered after payment of ransom by their relatives (Female Community Member, Wukari, 38yrs).

Thirdly, the longstanding conflict between different ethnic groups in this senatorial district is passed from generation to generation and has seeded a strong feeling of resentment towards the out-group. As a result of this, kidnapping then becomes a source of conflict in this part of the state. When a person is kidnapped and the kidnappers are members of a particular ethnic group it sometimes triggers a conflict between these ethnic groups. The ethnic group of the perpetrators is usually ascertained by the location of a kidnap incident or when the kidnappers call for ransom. Once this is determined, it leads to social tensions which in some cases leads to full-blown ethnic crisis. The paper therefore argues that kidnapping is both an immediate trigger to ethnic clashes as well as the product of the long-standing ethnic skirmishes between and among the ethnic groups from this region.

Corrupt leaders and security agents

This study also found that corruption is one of the causes of kidnapping in Southern Taraba and or is a factor helping to accentuate the same. This comes from the colluding of security agents and the kidnappers. It stems from the fact that the security agents who are saddled with the responsibility of protecting the citizenry collect money from the kidnappers to keep mute even when they are aware of the activities of these criminals.

To give credence to the foregoing, one of the key informant interviewees who is a security agent noted that:

. . . even security agents are aiding kidnappers as well as politicians . . . they have informants from the communities, and security agents and everywhere. This shows how kidnapping has permeated Southern Taraba such that you cannot trust anyone (Male KII Participant, Security Agent, 48yrs, Takum).

We can infer from this narration above that the security system which is supposed to be the hope of the common man has since ‘soiled its hand’. It will be recalled that the former Minister of Defense retired General T.Y Danjuma in 2018 accused the Nigerian Army of colluding with criminals. This statement heated the polity and made the Nigerian Army to set up a committee to investigate the validity of his assertion. In the end the Nigerian Army refuted this claim. However, barely a year after, the killing of three police Officers and the release of the popular kidnap kingpin Hamisu Bala Wadume from the police by the Nigerian Army implicates the nation’s security architecture. The Police under the Inspector General Special Intelligence Response Team IRT arrested Wadume a millionaire kidnap kingpin in Ibi local government area of southern Taraba. But shortly after his arrest, the soldiers attached to Battalion 93 attacked the police in the vehicle carrying the kidnap kingpin from the scene of his arrest and allowed him to escape (Pulse, 2019). He was later re-arrested some days after in a hideout at Layin Mai Allo Hotoro area of Kano state. The police had been on a massive manhunt for the suspect since the unfortunate incident in Ibi Taraba state that resulted in the murder of three police officers, two civilians, and five others injured (Punch, 2019).

An Army captain purportedly ordered soldiers on a security checkpoint along Ibi-Jalingo expressway in Taraba to attack and kill the police operatives attached to the Police Special Intelligence Response Team (IRT) (Pulse, 2019). The police alleged that the Army Captain might have been providing cover for the kidnapper, who is said to have received ransoms of hundreds of millions from his victims. Eventually, the Army Captain was arrested alongside five other Army personnel, who had allegedly taken part in the killing of three policemen and two civilian agents in an operation to arrest the notorious kidnap kingpin, Wadume in Ibi Taraba state. It was reported by Pulse (2019) that the arrested soldiers confessed that they received orders to attack the policemen from the captain; they further said he (the captain) informed them that Wadume had been captured and was being conveyed in a silver-coloured Toyota Hiace Bus. The investigation further revealed that the Army Captain who was not present in Ibi town when the incident took place might have ordered his men to attack and kill the IRT operatives and as well rescue the ‘kidnapper his friend’ (the wanted kidnap kingpin Wadume) base on a tip-off from one of his many sources in the security structure in the area (Pulse, 2019).

Again, one of the Key informant Interviewees a former politician from Ibi stated:

There is a local collaboration between the security agents and the kidnappers because of the little things the security agents get from the kidnappers. For example, the popular kidnapper Wadume in Ibi was the one fueling patrol vehicle for the security operatives like the police and Army. So, the security agents turn blind eyes to kidnappers in this region (Male, Politician, Ibi, 52yrs).

By inference, it is clear that one of the reasons for the ascendancy of kidnapping in Southern Taraba is the corruption perpetrated by the agents meant to secure the lives and properties of the general public. The susceptibility of the security structure to corruption is further enhanced by the corruption even within the system. The embezzlement of monies by the security chiefs meant for enforcement duties further exposes the officers to bribery and corruption.

This study also brought to the bare another form of corruption which is between the kidnappers and politicians. In this case, the kidnappers are used and sponsored by politicians to hunt down a perceived political rival. In this case the political rival is abducted and ransom is demanded after which the abducted person is either killed or freed. The motive behind this form of kidnapping is purely political but the execution is done by kidnappers. A key informant interviewee (security agent) again observed thus

It looks like some politicians are using some of the kidnappers to hunt down their political rivals as well as gain some economic and political advantage (Male, Politician, Takum, 60yrs).

Kidnapping for political and economic gain

Kidnapping for political and economic gain is seen as one of the reasons for dastardly act in this region. The story of the kidnap kingpin who was arrested in 2019 brings to bare the above narration. This kidnap kingpin popularly referred to as Wadume Bala Hamisu is a millionaire kidnapper that hails from Ibi local government of southern Taraba. He is a very rich and influential youth in the community. He was celebrated in Ibi as though he was a 'king'. In Nigeria today, people are no longer bothered about how individuals get rich as far as they can share in the ill-gotten wealth; you are celebrated. One of the key informant interviewees who hails from Ibi local government area of Southern Taraba observed thus:

Wadume became rich overnight even though most people could not tell how he suddenly became rich. He was celebrated by many because he gives out money and other beautiful gifts like motor-cycles and cars to people. He has dug a borehole in a village called Sarkin-Kudu in Ibi and was building a mosque in the same village. He has

given out not less than 60 cars and over 100 motor-cycles in Ibi. The same Wadume even contested for the state of house assembly election in Ibi though he lost (Male, Politician, Ibi, 52yrs).

Again, the informant further stated that:

There is a general get-rich-quick syndrome among the youths. In Ibi where I hail from you will see so many youths who grew with us here becoming rich over night without any tangible job to show for it (Male, Community Leader, Ibi, 65yrs).

The celebration of success in Nigeria further exacerbates the problem. Once a person gets rich, he becomes a hero without anyone taken time out to question the source of wealth.

Poor forest management/governance

In southern Taraba, the presence of forests along the highways has aided the activities of kidnappers in this region. These forests that are supposed to be used for agricultural activities have since turned into kidnappers' den. The activities of kidnappers in this senatorial district especially the ones that took place on the highways were mostly reported that the victims were diverted from the highways to a thick forest. The forests that lie between Takum and Katsin-Ala in Benue state, the forest between Wukari and Takum, and the one between Ibi and Wukari are good examples of forest that has been used for series of kidnappings recorded in Southern Taraba.

The forest and the wildlife guards who are saddle with responsibility of protecting the trees and animals; are now afraid of penetrating the forest because they cannot stand the sophistication of weapons mostly used by these kidnappers. Therefore, most of the forest are taken over as hideout by kidnappers.

Discussion

This paper interrogates the nexus between ethnic violence and kidnapping in southern Taraba state. Even though the Nigerian civil war started and ended over four decades ago, issues of ethnic violence still characterized the country with more intensity and wider coverage especially since the return to a democratic dispensation in 1999 (Olaniyan and Omotola, 2015; Ojedokun, Tade, Aderinto and Okolo, 2019). Ethnic violence has occurred in most of the states in Nigeria at different times with different degree of casualties recorded (Ojedokun, et al, 2019). Commenting on ethnic violence Aluko (2003) argued that cultural variation is one of the most complex aspects of social life in Africa. The problem of ethnic violence is that it produces ethnic militias. As captured in the research work of Ojedokun et al (2019), which is in tandem with the one of the findings

from this study, the problem of ethnicity has transmuted into ethnic militias across the country. These ethnic militias in turn move into kidnapping after the conflicts are over. Hence, the revelation from this study is consistent with the finding from the research work by Ojedokun et al (2019) which shows that proliferation of arms and ethnic militia is one of the major reasons for the high rate of criminality manifested in diverse ways in Nigeria.

For example, before the upsurge of kidnapping in the region, there were issues of Tiv/Jukun and Kuteb vs Chamba crisis in Wukari, Takum and some parts of Ussa Local government area. Therefore, this study shows that the reason for this form of kidnapping is to inflict pain on the opposite ethnic group who are perceived as enemies. This is in tandem with the assertion of Ezemenaka (2018) on the causes of kidnappings, where he observed that one of the causes of kidnappings is vengeful justice. Hence, the ethnic form of kidnappings in Southern Taraba could be said to be for vengeance. It is however good to note that though this form of kidnapping is perpetrated for ethnic reasons where vengeance is sought against a rival ethnic group, it could sometimes come garbed with economic undertones. Hence, we assert that though the underlying motive for this form of kidnapping is ethnicity, the result could also rake in economic benefits especially when ransom is sought for and is received. Sadly, sometimes the victims of this form of kidnapping are killed even after ransom has been paid. The death of Honourable Hosea Ibi is one good example of kidnapped victim killed even when ransom had been paid. The killing of the member is largely ethnic and political with economic undertone.

This paper found corruption by security agents as one of the reasons for kidnapping in southern Taraba state. This agrees with the assertion by Ogbuehi (2018), who adduced that one of the reasons for the rising tide of kidnappings in Nigeria is the corruption that pervades the security architecture itself. It is as a result of the corruption that characterised the security architecture that Ogbuehi (2018) posited that the chief security officers of all Nigeria law enforcement agencies must take the matter of their budget with all seriousness to avoid issue of corruption. Equipping their agencies with modern crime fighting facilities to ease the workload of the officers will also reduce the susceptibility of officers to bribery and corruption. This study again, corroborates an earlier assertion by Akinloye (2017) where he contends that security agencies also collude with kidnappers for money; their greediness will not allow them to be effective, and are only effective when an influential person is involved.

In Nigeria, the celebration of success without questioning the source is gradually becoming a norm. This is mostly aggravated by poverty, unemployment and hunger (Chukwuma and Fakumo 2014). For Onovo (2009), the celebration of fraudsters by our leaders makes kidnapping and other forms of criminalities to thrive. For example, after

the arrest of the kidnap kingpin Wadume, pictures began to thrill the social media of the kingpin and many highly placed politicians in the state.

Closely akin to this is the fact that at the center of organized crimes like kidnapping is the desperate quest for economic empowerment and social climbing as averred by the proponents of the queer ladder theory who posit that organized crime is simply a pathway to an end. Through crimes like kidnapping individuals are able to change their social status through wealth accumulation (Mallory, 2007; Okoli and Orinya, 2013). It is expedient to note that once some of these criminals gain moneys from criminal activities, they later venture into politics to give them some 'protective' cover as well as open up another means of amassing wealth because one of the ways to make quick money in Nigeria is politics. A good example is the case of the popular kidnapper Wadume. This alleged kidnapper had vied for the state house of assembly in the concluded 2019 general elections. Although he lost the elections but it gives credence to the fact that kidnappers are aware of their socio-political environment.

The above finding aligns with the queer ladder theory which views crime (kidnapping) as a means to an end. A means to economic rising fuelled by desperate desire to gain wealth and influence in the society. It is a means of changing socio-economic class by amassing wealth.

This study also shows how poor forest management is exploited by unscrupulous elements (kidnappers) in the region. Forests are useful hiding places for criminal groups, particularly when their number runs into hundreds. For kidnappers this is particularly useful especially when the number of victims also runs into hundreds. For example, Boko Haram has been using the Sambisa Forest both as a protective cover and hideout for their human cargo and themselves. Crime syndicates have also used the vast forestland between Abuja and Kaduna for their activities. They abduct victims for ransom on highways and then hide them in forests. In some places the evidence of kidnapping is only revealed by mass graves that are discovered in the forest (Azeez, 2018). Forests which are supposed to be a blessing have turn out to be a curse.

The main limitation of this study is that it employed a qualitative method of data collection which means the result from this study cannot be generalized. Also, this current study is unable to provide information on the pattern and typology of kidnappings in Southern Taraba. This is an area in which future research focusing on kidnapping in Southern Taraba can investigate. Future research in this area may also employ a quantitative method of data collection so the result can be generalized. However, despite the identified limitations, the outcome of this research has generated important and unique insights into the factors underlying kidnapping in Southern Taraba.

CONCLUSION

This study explored kidnappings in Southern Taraba. This menace is so prevalent that the senatorial district is gradually drifting into a Hobbesian state. The ascendancy of the menace is a product of the long historical violence between and among the indigenous ethnic groups. Ethnic violence leads to ethnic form of kidnapping and kidnapping also triggers ethnic violence in the region. Other causes of kidnapping as espoused by this study is the collusion between the security agents and the kidnappers, poor forest management as well as kidnapping for political and economic gain. The study also reveals that kidnapping is highly detrimental to the unity and socio-economic progress of the district. It results in the waste of massive human and material resources; increases social disharmony and fear, stimulates clashes and skirmishes, and increases economic instability and disinvestment. It also leads to a decline of agricultural and commercial activities which has consequences on youth employment.

Based on the findings from this study there is the need for Taraba state government to settle issues leading to ethnic and religious clashes in Southern Taraba. One good example of these problems is the Chieftaincy tussle in Takum. These conflict triggers among and between ethnic groups in the zone give birth to most of the security challenges experienced. The security agencies should be properly remunerated as well as empowered with current gadgets, and technologies that will help them curb with current trends of criminalities. The recruitment process in security agencies should be sanitized so that those who are to be recruited should be people with proven integrity and not criminals.

There is a need for improved forest management by the government. The local traditional authorities should be arrogated powers to investigate youths within their domain whom they feel have questionable characters. Parents should avoid mounting of unnecessary pressure on their wards by forcing them to do what others are doing.

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