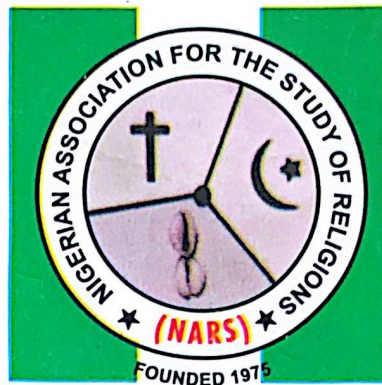


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YORUBA RELIGION AND THE RELEVANCE OF CIVILIAN JOINT TASK FORCE (CJTF) IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Today's global age has lost its security as a result of terrorism and attacks. This made the world to be in search for security. Security in Nigeria is a major concern in recent times, where cases of abduction, kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, raping, herdsmen, armed robbery, and burgeoning restlessness among other have been unabatedly rampant. Despite the state apparatus to ensure safety and protection of lives and properties, Nigerians are living in perpetual fear and worry. Obviously, the state can no longer protect her citizens from attacks and killings. The paper adopted historical and descriptive methods to examine the role of Yoruba Religion and the relevance of government in the Southwest forming synergy with civilian security agencies in other to curb security challenges ravaging the society. The paper discovered that the Civilian Joint Task Force in Northeast, Nigeria has served, and achieved tremendous and laudable success. The same can be replicated in Southwest so as to achieve the same purpose. Therefore, the paper recommends that Civilian Task Force would serve as a better alternative to insecurity in South Western Nigeria.

Keywords: Yoruba Religion, Civilian Joint Task Force, security, and Crime

Introduction

Today's global age has lost its security because the world is in search of security and Nigeria is not an exception. The incessant violence and crimes in Nigeria have become a monumental threat to national security and it has become a major concern in recent times. Some of these violent crimes include abduction, kidnapping, terrorism, insurgency, banditry which has fanged in armed robbery, cattle rustling, Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram that joined dawn marchers to orchestrate moral evils in Nigeria particularly in the Southwest. Due to religio-political, agenda, Fulani herdsmen all in the name of cattle rearing have been abducting and terrorizing their host communities. It is discovered that majority of them have abandoned their cattle for kidnaping business, because it is a lucrative job for them. Okoli, according to Alamu regards the Fulani herdsmen occupation as a sort of banditry¹. Thus, banditry includes cattle rustling, armed robbery, and kidnapping for ransom.

In the South-west, Some Fulani herdsmen have been abducting people since 2015 when President Buhari took over power from Goodluck Jonathan². They abduct where ever they are, and rape their female victims whether married or single before asking them for ransom. This evil has gone to an alarming rate to the point that the 'Voice of Africa' stated that "a recent wave of abductions in Nigeria is raising fear across the country".³ The fact remains that they do this abduction with impunity in Nigeria and particularly in the South-West. The irony of it is that none of the Fulani herdsmen has been arrested talk-less of bringing them to book. On many occasions, they blocked the highways for hours and they would not be checked by any of the security agencies. The reasons for the attitude of the security agencies could not be farfetched from the factors that range from political connection to ethnic affiliation they have with the President. The abduction by the Fulani herdsmen has remained unabated, and has been causing sleeplessness, tensions, insecurity and anxiety in the South-West. No wonder when Okoli is apposite when he states that "kidnaping thrives in an environment that condones crime, where criminal opportunism and impunity prevail over and above deterrence"⁴.

In retrospect, the government has put in place measures such as, the Nigerian Police's anti-kidnaping squad, introduced in 2000s and the criminal law. Despite all these measures by the government, to stem the menace, weak sanctioning and weak deterrent mechanisms coupled with lack of political will, lack of man power, and poor logistics have obliterated government plan⁵. This seriously calls for concern if the South-West has to remain as a region. For the consequences of these would be more frightful to the families and friends of the victims. These kidnappers cum Fulani herdsmen persist in their evil because the benefit of their crimes to them supersede the worth of their cattle and the problems of grazing phenomenon. It is on this note that the research work will examine the role of Yoruba religion and the relevance of government in South-West forming synergy with civilian security agencies to curb security challenges ravaging the zone. The fact remains that such a civilian security has been in practice in the North-East and it has been working for them.

Yoruba People and Their Religion

The study of any religion is the study of the people who practice the religion. Aside man, there can be no religion. Religion can only come as a result of the activities of two agents – God who reveals Himself to man, and man who embraces and responds to God's revelation.⁶ It is therefore proper to know the man himself, so as to know much about his religion. Therefore, the study of Yoruba Religion is the study of people that practice the religion. Yoruba is one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and are predominantly found in the south western part of Nigeria, and in some parts of Dahomey (Republic of Benin) and Togo land.⁷ The Yoruba belong to Ogun, Oyo, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo and Lagos State of Nigeria. A substantial portion of the population of Kogi and Kwara States are also Yoruba.⁸ The Yoruba are many and are regarded as one of the most advanced communities in West Africa, especially in religion, agriculture, commerce,

education, art, intelligence, government, and warfare. These people have a longstanding history, and they trace their ancestral home to Ile-Ife where they believe that the act of creation began. The Yoruba myth tells of God lowering down a chain at Ile-Ife through which Oduduwa, the ancestor of all people came down, bringing with him a cock, some earth, and a palm kernel. The earth was thrown into the water, the cock scratched it to become land and the kernel grew into a tree with sixteen limbs representing the original kingdom.⁹ Yoruba language is rich in proverbs, folktales, and pithy sayings. These serve as the basis of the Yoruba culture, and general conceptual frame-work which provides a structure for their religious beliefs and practices.¹⁰ However, the origin of the Yoruba nation is not involved in obscurity¹¹ Like the early history of most nations, the commonly received accounts are for the most part purely legendary.

Yoruba originally believe in deities and divinities. They however believe in the existence of an Almighty God, who they term *Olorun* that is Lord of Heaven.¹² They acknowledge Him as the maker of Heaven and Earth, but too exalted to concern Himself directly with men and their affairs. Hence, they admit the existence of many deities as intermediaries, and these they term as *Orisa*.¹³ That is to say that Yoruba Religion is the indigenous religion of the Yoruba people. There was a time in Nigerian history when the only practiced religion was the indigenous religion.¹⁴ This was also the case with the rest of Africa, otherwise called African Religion by scholars. The religion has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Yoruba by oral tradition.¹⁵ It is a religion that the Yoruba have made theirs by living and preaching it. It has no written literature but it is written everywhere for those that care to see and read. It is written in the peoples' myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings.¹⁶ It is a religion that has no founder and zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Yoruba whether young or old. The religion is a heritage from the past but it is treated not as a thing of the forgotten past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women.¹⁷ The above shows that Yoruba Religion means the Indigenous Religion of the Yoruba and has no founder.

Concept of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is a loose group of militants that was formed in 2013 in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria to support the Nigerian security forces in the fight against Boko Haram. Although, there is no adequate data revealing the origin of the CJTF in Northern Nigeria, but some pieces of evidence attributed the philosophy to the courageous role of Baba Lawal Jafar of the *Hausari* ward in Maiduguri.¹⁸ The group progressively expanded over the years. The group has been engaging in security operations and providing security to camps for internally displaced population.¹⁹ The birth of the Civilian Joint Task Force was as a result of the campaign against Boko Haram intensified. Youth in their hundreds found themselves in campus of various security forces in Maiduguri and environs. It was noted that the brutality coming from the Military Joint Task

Force (MJTF) and the unbearable hardship caused by the declaration of the state of emergency prompted youths in Maiduguri to rise fearlessly against Boko Haram. These activities started at *Hausari* area in Maiduguri town in June, 2013. The youth therefore, organized themselves and decided to attack any terrorist that paroled any place around Monday market or *Babanlayi* to rob or detonate explosive or shoot innocent civilians. They were around with local traditional weapons such as bow and arrow, matchets, and hunter gun.²⁰ Men that overcame their fears enlisted in hundreds in the anti-Boko Haram fight.

It should be noted that the Civilian Joint Task Force is both a new and old practices but with a new name. There have always been vigilantes, community self-help, especially in a country where the government security operatives are legendary at its failure to tackle the security challenges.²¹ Many communities have had to defend and save themselves whenever the government failed. In the North-Central vigilantes have been used by many communities to defend themselves against rampaging Fulani herdsmen, in South East Bakassi Boys were once legendary as they rose to rid the South East of the notorious armed robbers, ritualists and the kidnappers, in the South West, there is the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC).²²

Civilian Joint Task Force could then be seen as a child of necessity because it could be regarded as a dynamic intervention of God to the peoples' yearning as a result of the massacre and slaughtering in the North. In Olugbode's view, he sees CJTF as some youth who came out to declare that enough is enough²³. They fought back with stick, knives, and sword, standing against the bombs and gun of the sects.

The activities of the insurgence, kidnappers, and the Fulani herdsmen cannot be shoveled away because lives are being claimed on a daily basis. Forming a CJTF in South West is not a new idea because the region has been operating on Vigilantes, Hunters' Guild and *Amotekun* decades ago. The newly formed *Amotekun* can also be regarded as an old practice with a new name. This is the activity of Yoruba Religion in the South West in promoting security. These groups of bodies come together with communal effort through magical fortification help to ward-off social and moral vices in the communities such as stealing, kidnappings and other vices. The Vigilantes groups use protective medicine like soap, or incisions and charms against bullets, acid attacks, and other forms of bodily injuries²⁴. These are done so as to protect and preserve the life of their community members. Through the use of charms, they are confident that nothing can stop them. It is believed that the African spiritual power is capable of ensuring peace and stability. Today, the Nigeria Police and government are partnering with the above groups for effective community policing.

It is not an over statement to say that Nigeria of today with emphasis on South West, is in a sorry state of insecurity. Alamu observes that "insecurity brings a concatenation of appalling circumstances that make it difficult for people to live in peace and safety, and as well overcome their developmental challenges"²⁵. We are alarmed by the upsurge in abduction, crime waves, kidnapping, assassination, Fulani herdsmen, and other vices aroused the concern

for the adoption of CJTF by the government particularly in the South West. This idea could not be far-fetched with the birth of *Amotekun* in South West of Nigeria. *Amotekun* was launched on 9th January, 2020 by the South Western states namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, and Ekiti with the aim of tackling the problem of insecurity within the region²⁶. The apparent goal of Operation *Amotekun* (leopard) is to support and supplement the national police service, but not to replace nor undermine the work of federal security services. Governor Fayemi of Ekiti State categorically stated that "We are not here to undermine the power of the Federal Government of Nigeria, but our primary interest is the security and safety of our people"²⁷. The above objective could be regarded as serving as interventionists or the last resort. The reason for this could not be far-fetched because the security loophole in the country has enabled stakeholders to clamour for community and private policing in order to provide support for operational efficiency.

Relevance of Civilian Joint Task Force

The relevance of CJTF cannot be overemphasized, because the fact that the security loophole in the country has enabled the stakeholder to clamour for CJTF so that it would support the operational efficiency. Their effort would complement that of the police and other security agencies. Alamu is of the opinion that through their operational need, statutory recognition should be given to this community effort as a basis for legal backing. And that the initiative should be sustained.²⁸ Looking at Alamu's position, the synergy of the partnership would create mutual obligation, ensure safety and protection of lives and properties even at the grassroot on the part of the community and other security agencies. It should be noted that the reason for the advocacy for the sustenance of this group is on the belief that foreign investors would be wooed back, and there would be conducive environment for investment and habitation. It will not be out of place when the CJTF are co-opted in the activities of maintaining the checkpoints, there they could identify some of the culprits because of their eagle-eye and also provide useful information to the military they are collaborating with because they are closer to the grassroot²⁹. Bamidele opined that Civilian JTF is an alternative method in the fight against insurgency in Nigeria. He believes that the usual hard way had not produced the desired results, using security operatives alone had failed. And that in the Northeast region, most activities are shaped by Civilian JTF made up of local people, inter alia: male and female local people³⁰.

Conclusion

The above scenario has given us the true picture of the state of insecurity in Nigerian nation viz-a-viz South West, and has revealed to us that Nigeria is in dear need of security. It is understood that the Federal Government in collaboration with the law enforcement agencies has been doing what seems to be her best, but much has not been achieved. It is glaring that government has a lot of burden on her part and it seems as if they can no longer cope with the security challenges and the new waves in the country.

On this note, the ultimate way forward to address the nation's security lapses is to give enabling environment for Civilian Joint Task Force whereby they would be given statutory backing couple with adequate logistics. Funding should be made available to them at the State and Local Government levels so as to complement the effort of the Federal Government so that there could be effective policing of the neighborhoods. Overtime, this collaborative effort consciously or unconsciously in a unique way will solve internal security problems. As a commitment, this would serve as an objective policy of the nation that would attract peace, development, and investment by ensuring that the environment is attractive and quality of life is promoted.

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