



An Overview of the Accounts of Insurgency and Banditry in Nigeria: Helon Habilas *the Chibok Girls* and Philip Ukanah's *in God's Name* as Case Study

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria. It carries Out a survey of the comprehensive accounts as presented by two acclaimed/veteran novelists, writers and journalists – Helon Habila and Philip Ukanah in their novels. The paper opines that insurgency and banditry, if not nipped in the bud, could shipwreck Nigeria, and that these two evils are potential harbingers of doom, capable of destroying Nigeria. This paper concludes by recommending that among others, literary artists, government agencies, government and non - governmental organizations should be awake to the reality of the time, literary writers would do well to begin, in earnest to write and publish didactic prose-fiction works, theater experts should also begin to write and produce films that would re-orientate youths and the budding generation, such that literature as a field of scholarship would not be studied for academic purpose alone but would be seen as a veritable tool to re-engineer the society.

Key words: *Insurgency, Banditry, Safety, Kidnapping, Boko-haram*

Introduction

Troops of the Nigerian Army have rescued 461.

Boko Haram captives and killed some insurgents during a raid and search operation between Jakana and Mainok area of Maiduguri – Damaturu Road in Borno State.... Combed Boko Haram hideouts and killed some insurgents”

**Nicholas Kalu, *The Nation*
Monday January 6, 2020.**

The Katsina State Police Command on yesterday evening, gunned down two bandits, arrested one and freed their victims in a duel. The state Commissioner of Police, CP Sanusi Buba.... said you will recall in my 2019 briefing, where I promised the people

of Katsina State that 2020 will witness a paradigm shift in the ongoing onslaught against crime and criminality in the state, especially in the fight against banditry....

**Augustine Okezie,
The Nation
Vol. 14. No. 4919
Sunday January 19, 2020.**

The two citations above from *The Nation* Newspapers of Sunday, January 19, 2020 and Monday, January 6, 2020 respectively indicate the focal point of this paper. The quotes capture unequivocally, the thought pattern of this researcher. The phenomenon of insurgency and banditry have become cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the entire nation of Nigeria. Every Nigerian directly or indirectly has been affected by it. Insurgency is an attempt to take control of a country by force. Ayto (2002) sees insurgent as a rebel or a revolutionary. According to him, the word comes via French, from Latin – insurgent – meaning ‘arising’ this was from the verb “insurgere”, made

up of in- meaning ‘into or towards’ and “surgere” meaning to ‘to rise’ (which is where the word ‘surge’ comes from. He also posits that insurrection has the same origin as the word insurgent.

Okoli and Okpaleke (2014:350) quoting *Nigeria Watch*, 2011 state:

Banditry means occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force. Or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob, rape or kill. Banditry is a crime against persons. It has been a common genre of crime, as well as cause violence in contemporary societies.

According to *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary of Current English*, banditry is the act of stealing and violence by bandits (armed robbers). As it is evident from the above, banditry is the life and practice of bandits in the society. In the words of Okoli and Okpaleke “the prevalence of banditry in Nigeria appears to have been high and rising over the years”. Quoting Rotberg (2007:33), the duo posits further that “crime against persons, including murder, rape, and robbery has grown in scale and viciousness in Nigeria since 1999 and that this has been demonstrated by the pervasive trend of armed robbery in the country, which in effect mirrors the Africa-wide experience.”

In a clear and easily understood way, Okoli (2019:1) writes:

Rural banditry refers to armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation. The victims are individuals and communities with material valuables. The most common examples of rural banditry in Nigeria are armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and village raids.

Nigeria has been pointed out time and again as the giant of Africa with a population of about two hundred million people. Habila and Ukanah have been detailed in capturing the whole events of violence, ethno-religious and barbaric killings in Nigeria since independence of 1960 to date.

Justification for the Study

There are quite a number of research works on the menaces of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria but little or no ones really call the attention of stake-holders,

governments, and the populace to the need to employ didactic literary works to re-engineer the society and mobilize people sensibilities as it is done in those good olden days. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) recommends “a public-private-partnership (PPP) approach to policing as a means of addressing the rising prevalence of banditry in Nigeria”, Odinkalu (2018) traces banditry as a “long war in Nigeria”, Suleiman (2019) bothers on and prioritizes “rural banditry in Zamfara State, North-West Nigeria”. In this research work, attempt is made to interrogate insurgency and banditry with a view to pointing out the roles of literary artists, government and its agencies, and roles of producers of films and even individual citizens could play in curbing the menace of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria in particular and the world at large. It reviews the cases of insurgency, banditry, the emergence of Boko-haram, the action and in action of Nigeria government.

Overview of Insurgency and Banditry in Nigeria

Insurgency and banditry are dual evils that have threatened the security in the nation-Nigeria.

According to Odinkalu in *The Punch* Newspaper of December, 27, 2018, *“Bandits” have emerged as the new bogeyman for insecurity in Nigeria, joining a long (and still growing list) that includes Boko Haram, cultists, herdsmen, kidnappers and militants. In different parts of the North-West, from Birnin-Gwari in Kaduna to Tsafe in Zamfara, bandits are offered as the trope for an intolerable carnage, and the inexplicable haplessness of a Federal Government that does not appear to care for much else in an election season. As this lamentable state metastasizes, it may be worthwhile to reflect on banditry in Nigeria.*

Odinkalu 2018 further posits that “in different parts of Nigeria, banditry is used to describe different variants of outlawry, in reality, the usage conflates two underlying problems- in effective law enforcement in Southern Nigeria, and the crisis of ungoverned spaces in Northern Nigeria”. And that since independence, “successive governments have had to confront variants of these trends.” According to him, “the evidence over time suggests a link between governance, its failures, and banditry.”

Okoli, (2019: 1) submits:

Banditry is on the increase in Northern Nigeria. This is a region with many security problems, chief among them Boko Haram's insurgency. In the north-central region, herdsmen militancy has become a key security concern, Northern Nigeria which used to be the bastion of security and stability, has been hit hard by rural banditry.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that insecurity has gained ascendancy over the entirety of Northern Nigeria and that even the North-West which used to be the 'bastion of security of its peace and tranquility.'

Okoli, 2019 further revealingly enshrines:

Rural banditry in the northwestern states of Zamfara, Kaduna and Katsina has reached alarming heights in recent years. Bandits terrorize villages with impunity. They have actually settled in the Zamfara State, setting up fortified enclaves in the hinterland and on the frontiers, from where they plot and carry out their operations.

Ukanah (2011:1) submits, in what he describes as the horrors and terrors of a nation:

Not less than 100,000 people have been killed in different major and minor religious conflicts in Nigeria in the last three decades. That figure is a tenth of the one million deaths recorded in the Nigerian Civil War of 1966, a substantial portion of the two million people killed during the partitioning of India in 1947 and probably more than the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) killed globally in its first year of discovery! More than 1,000 churches and far less number of mosques, thousands of houses, shops, small business, public buildings and hotels have been inferno of religious angels of mass destruction in the northern region of the country.

Quoting Ellis, Odinkalu (2018) is of the view that post-independence banditry and insurgency in Nigeria are “shortly before the civil war, when governance broke in some parts of the Western Region and there was a blurred line between political violence, crime, and organized insurgency”.

Causes of Insurgency and Banditry in Nigeria

There are quite a number of factors that could be instrumental to the above anomalies. One of them is the failure of the government to provide basic education, amenities and infrastructural facilities for the people. Okoli (2009:1) corroborated the above when he writes:

Crime thrives in contexts where there is little deterrence. In most of Nigeria’s rural communities, there are many opportunities for criminal activity. For one thing, some of these communities are located in remote areas where there is little or no government presence. More importantly, household are in some cases separated by and interspersed with forest areas. This renders them vulnerable to banditry.

Okoli goes ahead to pin-point “absence of effective community policing mechanisms, vast rugged and hazardous forest lands, borders that poorly delineated, under-policed and thus not well-governed” as some of the causes. According to him “The consequence of this is an abundance of nefarious activities, often facilitated by criminal syndicates”. He believes that transhumance – the movement of cattle which is poorly regulated is also a factor and that many of the cattle rustling gangs are mercenaries of Boko Haram. Odinkalu (2018:1) believes that outlawry, insurgency and banditry is traceable to armed robbers. Among others, he mentioned:

1. Ishola Oyenusi, who terrorized Lagos at the end of the civil war.
2. Three armed men who robbed a bank in Kano of £27, 750.
3. Lawrence Anini, another school drop-out who concatenated advocacy for the downtrodden.
4. In the 1990s, Shina Rambo who terrorized parts of South-Western Nigeria.
5. Otokoto case in Owerri, Imo State, in 1996 which revealed a netherworld of ritualized human sacrifice.
6. By the year 2000s, commercial kidnapping, political and assassinations.

7. Osisikankwu (Obioma Nwakwo)
8. Bakassi Boys
9. Public university cultic boys and confraternities.

As it is evident from the fore-going, the anomalies that have almost choked the nation of Nigeria are home-grown.

Analysis of Data

The subject matter of *In God's Name...* by Philip Oluwole Ukanah is the catastrophic Nigerian religious crises and tragedies of un-imaginable proportions that have been the lot of the Nigerian nation since immediately after independence to date. Its theme ranges from Africa and religion, advent of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, battles in the North and Maitatsine and his sect activities, OIC crises of 1986, religious riots, Sharia debate of 1988, the Boko Haram wars, the and consequences of religious crises, and the actions and in-actions of successive Nigerian governments. Ukanah is bothered with the menace of wanton killings in the name of religion, hence the title of his book – *In God's Name; The story of Nigeria's religious War and its Brutal Killings*.

The work could succinctly be described as a complete ensemble of religious wars, bloodshed and bloodletting, of fear, and tears, of genocide, of idiocy and lunacy, sorrows of a nation of blood-bath, and awe-striking riots.

Ukanah is chagrined at the inhumanity of man to his fellow human beings in his book when he states:

They revel in shedding blood for religions causes as they murder and main men, women, the aged, virile youths and vulnerable children in the belief that heaven awaits them with open arms after doing those. For more than thirty years, they have been performing their murderous orgies to the delight and silent applause of some of their spiritual kinsmen numbering in several millions and are backed with resources from foreign governments. Yet the governments under which all these take place literally look on; even they are used to indulging them from time to time.

To buttress the foregoing, Ukanah (2011) further writes "... Kwankwaso had admitted that between 1999 and 2004, Nigeria had recorded 47 ethno-religious conflicts but Professor J. Elaigwu who runs a think-tank on conflict management in Jos listed 140 of such conflicts in his paper at the same workshop". He appeals to the reasoning of his audience/readers and the general public to be alive to the fact that danger looms and things may eventually fall apart and the country torn and engulfed in war since 'Nigerian leaders and successive governments, by their embarrassing lethargy, hypocrisy complicity, taking of sides and security operatives' bias', have tipped the religions equation in the country to a cataclysmic point.

The Author

Ukanah, Philip Oluwole is a former deputy editor of one of Nigerian newspapers, and he is currently a pastor, a writer and book editor/producer. This book is his first book.

The novel-*The Chibok girls* by the acclaimed novelist and journalist, and an academic per excellence, bothers on the heart-rending account of the tragedy master-minded by the Boko-Haram insurgents and the devastating consequence of unimaginable proportion that follows thereafter. His approach was a blend of fact and fiction (faction). In fact, he is said to have employed "a fiction writer's sensibility and a journalist's curiosity". Habila visited Chibok to examine the catastrophic event that occurred on April 14, 2014 at Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok, Borno, State, Northern Nigeria in which two hundred and seventy six (276) girls were kidnapped and the boys were brutally killed by the deadly terrorist group. Fifty seven (57) of the girls were able to escape and hitherto nothing had been heard about rest the of them. Habila, among other things, treats the themes of battle of violence and war of child abuse, of wickedness and man's inhumanity of man to his fellow human beings. He also explores the theme of ignorance, lack of education for the younger generation and the failure of the government in the country. In this 85-paged novel, Habila traces the history of Nigeria and its heart-ailing stories. Story of violence, riots, coup de'tat, insurgency and banditry to the period immediately after independence. He unequivocally submits thus:

Soon after independence, Nigeria's ethnic and political disunity began to show. In 1966, just six years later, the country experienced its first coup d'etat in which almost

the entire crop of post-independence political leaders was wiped out by young military officers, and the template had been set. In 1967 the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria attempted to secede, declaring their region the Republic of Biafra. A civil war ensued and took over a million lives, most of them civilians. General Yakubu Gowon, the military President who led the Federal Government during this time, was ousted in a palace coup by Brigadier Murtala Muhammed who was himself killed six months later by Major Buka Dimka. Dimka didn't get to be President, though. He was court-martialed and executed by a firing squad (38).

Habila went to the town and interviewed the parents of the kidnapped girls. He got more than he bargained for as the parents and inhabitants of Chibok narrated their ordeals:

In Kwanga close by, in one Sunday, they killed Over fifty Christians...They burned houses and Killed people.... (26).

In response to his questions; “What of the parents of the kidnapped girls? How are they coping?, the response he got was “It is sad. A few of them have died. They developed high blood pressure and all sorts of ailments.”

The Author

Helon Habila is a Nigerian who grew up in the Northern Nigeria. He had worked in Lagos as a journalist before he moved to England. As an academic he has published many novels and short stories. Habila, a professor of Creative Writing, lives in Virginia with his wife and three children.

Subjecting the two novels (works) to serious scrutiny, one could see that they have areas of convergence and areas of divergence. At the level of convergence it is clear that the two works are accounts of ethno-religious war. *In God's Name* is more comprehensive as the work has 440 pages with 53 chapters while *The Chibok Girls* has just 92 pages, having the kidnapping of the Chibok girls as its central message or focal point.

In the works, the key issues raised are insurgency, banditry and the causative agents of the ugly tendencies. The remainder of this sub-heading thus presents these three issues in the eyes of the two writers:

Insurgency: As far as Habila is concerned, negligence on the part of the government, could inform insurgency, the successive Nigerian governments seem to be care free about the welfare of the citizens and the soldiers assigned to fight outlawry. This is evident in the following statement:

*...You think? you think? he shouted....
You people think say we are here to
play? I dey here for this bush fighting
Boko Haram for two years now. Two
years I no see my family, and you
tell me you think? (page 15)*

Its also evident in:

*... so you are civilian JTF? So what?
four months we have been here without
salary, our friends are killed by Boko
Haram, and I am sick, four months no pay.*

Ukanah in his *In God's Name*... also seems to be treading the path of Habila when he enshrines:

*... sad enough, many of those killed
in these crises are children and youths
with the most to live for. Yet it is
doubtful whether these grim pictures
have jarred the government into action.*

The two writers are pointing accusing finger to the Nigerian government that it was the failure of the state that inform insurgents causing mayhem in this region of Nigeria, especially in the north.

Banditry: Bandits are robbers. Habila lavishly writes:

*To raise funds, they raided banks,
mostly in rural areas, hauling away
millions of naira, which they use to
sponsor insurgency... (page 21)*

the foregoing indicated that these bandits are robbers most of them are just using religious war as cover-up. Ukanah also believes that huge amount of money was often lost to the activities of the bandits when he writes:

... in such cases, reports in newspapers and magazine often conclude that “properties worth millions of naira or thousands of naira” were lost.

We could see that these two writers have similar views on the issue of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria.

Causative agent(s): On the issue of what actually informs outlawry in Nigeria, the two writers are pin-pointing the same things although in different ways. First of all religion crises seem to be popular in the two works, for example, Ukanah in his chapterization examines among others, “religion: the world, Africa and Nigeria; the advent of Christianity in Nigeria; the Bauchi religious conflict of 1991; the mentality of Islamic fundamentalists; some causes the religious crises”. etc Habila also in his ‘chapter three’ (A history of violence) (page 37) traces the history of religious violence and the mayhem that is often launched on innocent citizens, he writes:

They now even kill other muslims, they throw bombs in mosques while people are praying....
(43)

Habila, quoting Toyin Falola further pin-points unemployment, political corruption, government mismanagement etc as causes of the outlawry. He maintains:

The Maitatsine was the first mass religious uprising post-independence, and the Nigerian historian, Toyin Falola, has pointed out that it happened “against a backdrop of declining revenues, high unemployment rates, political corruption and rivalries, government mismanagement, rampant materialism, and serious popular concern about the erosion of moral and religious values. (45)

The two literary works are evidently of the opinion that Banditry, insurgency and their causes are home-grown and it will take the collaborative efforts of all and sundry to curb the anomalies.

What Could be done to Checkmate the Ugly Tendencies

It has been pointed out in the course of writing this paper that the failure of the government is the major factor that informed outlawry, insurgency, banditry, armed robbery, etc. and that may be the reason Samaila Suleiman (2019) writes:

... another school of thought associates the growing insecurity with state failure due to corruption, the collapse of institutions of governance, de-industrialization, growing poverty, and a culture of impunity that pervades state and local governance...

The Federal Government of Nigeria will do well to be actively alive to the welfare and security of her citizens.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been the attempt of this research work to carry out an overview of the accounts of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria, using Helon Habila's *The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamic Militancy in Nigeria* and Philip Oluwole Ukanah's *In God's Name: The story of Nigeria's Religious War And its Brutal Killings* as case study. This paper has established these fact that the government, the public and private agencies, the successive federal, state, and local governments have their share of the blame. The individual citizens are also not left out. To address the above identified problems, the following measures are hereby recommended:

Government

The federal, state and local governments should revitalize the security architecture of their respective domains. The Nigerian Army, the Police and even the local vigilante groups should be fortified and equipped properly. The children, the youths should be given sound education. The young school leavers

should be provided with employments. This is what Falola. (2020:51) is indirectly saying when he maximally opines:

When the public resources are mismanaged by the minority few, the economic stature of the country is thrown off-balance and the people at the lower rung of power are sacrificed to bear the brunt. This unavoidably leads to hunger, and hunger usually forces people to undertake different types of immoral actions in their quest to survive. The surge in unemployment in the country means there would be an increased hunger, capable to push them into unwholesome indulgence. The engine room of every developing nation is their youth, whose zeal to engineer a change bubbles with uncommon motivation.

The Literate/Elite Class, Scholars and Literary Experts

The literati should be bothered about how literature could rescue the ugly tendencies. Total re-orientation of the citizens about literature as a field of study or discipline is needed. It should not be for academic purpose alone but could be used to re-engineer the society. The society, via the education and entertainment industries, should lay emphasis on didactic novels, plays and poetry.

School

Schools at all levels should revive the idea of school plays as it is done in those good old days when plays (didactic) are staged in the primary and secondary schools. Drama groups should also be encouraged by the society.

Media Houses

Television and radio stations should emphasis and be alive to didactic news items. Newspaper should also be encouraged to prioritize didactic materials. It is the sincere submission of this piece that implementing the foregoing measures suggested will go a long way in tackling the issues of outlawry, insurgency and banditry and other similar crimes in Nigeria.

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