

Vigilante Groups and Rural Banditry in Zamfara State: Excesses and Contradictions

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ABSTRACT: North-western Nigeria has witnessed high levels of cattle rustling and rural banditry in recent times. Virtually all states in this zone have faced one form of violence or the other as a result of cattle rustling. The Zamfara State experience seems to be amongst the worst incidences, with rural dwellers at the receiving end. Regrettably, most of the newspaper reports about banditry in Zamfara seem to be one-sided or passing statements. Rural banditry and cattle rustling in the state is quite different from other states. This is because of the active involvement of the vigilante groups in the conflict. In other areas, the vigilante contributed in cushioning the effect of banditry while in Zamfara, some of the vigilante members seized the opportunity of the conflict to 'witch-hunt their old foes'. Moreover, with the increase in the spate of the conflict in 2014, the vigilante group had divided opinions on how to approach the menace. Some were of the view that the bandits should be violently fought while others advocated for a peaceful approach. This led to the emergence of parallel vigilante groups in the state: the militant and non-militant wings. This division and violent approach to the bandits triggered the conflict to a certain proportion in 2015. As a result of this, whenever and wherever the bandits strike, their explanation is that they are on a 'vengeance mission' or 'reprisal attack' against the vigilante members that carried out extra-judicial killings on their fellow members. The aim of this paper is to assess the role of vigilante groups in the fight against rural banditry in Zamfara State and also trace the genesis of the division amongst the vigilante and how it further worsened the conflict between the vigilante groups on one hand and the bandits on the other.

KEYWORDS: Vigilantes, Rural Banditry, Cattle Rustling, Conflict

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I INTRODUCTION

Nigeria needs the involvement of informal security actors in peace and conflict resolution more than ever before. This is as a result of the multifaceted conflicts across different geo-political zones in the country. There is insurgency in the North-East, pipeline vandalisation and activities of militants in the Niger Delta in the South-South and endemic cattle rustling and rural armed banditry in the North-West and North-Central zones respectively. The underlying assumption is that the police and other security personnel will provide security of life and properties for average Nigerians. Unfortunately, the country has gross shortage of formal security personnel despite the ever increasing state of insecurity.

A study has shown that there are about 377,000 policemen for about 170 million Nigerians.¹ Sadly enough more than half of these policemen are attached to politicians and other top government officials. This invariably means that the ratio is one poorly motivated police officer to over 500 disgruntled and discontented Nigerians. This ugly situation has created an avenue for the formation and proliferation of different informal security outfits to fill up the vacuum left by the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The vigilante group of Nigeria is the oldest and largest informal security outfit in Nigeria, with a total of 3.2 million members across different states and Local Governments in the country.² There number is nine times larger than that of the Nigerian Police, which invariably means that, if properly and adequately trained on security strategies and tactics, they will go a long way in bridging the security gap in the country.

There are basically four types of vigilante groups in Nigeria: neighbourhood watch, ethnic, religious and state-sponsored vigilantes. This article is basically concerned with the neighbourhood watch and state vigilante groups which are basically found in the study area. The groups were formed to eradicate or, at least, curb the menace of cattle rustling in the state. Thus, having recognised their importance in the fight against

¹ .E. Ogbzor, 'Understanding the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria' United States Institute of Peace Special Report 391, September, 2016,p.2

² . Interview with Malam Usman Muhammad Jahun, Commander-General of Vigilante Group Nigeria, in Daily Trust Newspaper, Sunday, January 17, 2016, pp.54-55

cattle rusting in the state, the government provides moral and financial assistance to the group. Therefore, they have dual loyalty, first to the community that is responsible for its formation and to the government, their main sponsor. The focus of herein is to study the role of the vigilante groups in the fight against rural banditry in Zamfara State and show the nature, extent and impact of their involvement in the fight against miscreants and bandits in the state. The article further looks at the genesis of the division of opinions among their members on how to approach cattle rustling and rural armed banditry in the state. It also discusses how the division affected their operations in respect to peace and conflict resolution. In the light of these, the article is divided into four sections; the first section provides the abstract and introduction. The second gives a brief background on vigilantism, while section three deals with the vigilante and heightened insecurity; the emergence of militant vigilante groups and conclusion are addressed in the last section.

Rural Banditry in Zamfara State

Cattle rustling and armed banditry have become major problems in Zamfara State.³ The phenomenon has increased since 2010 leading to violent conflict between the Fulani people and their supporters from the Republic of Niger on one side and the farmers on the other. The outcome of this conflict has claimed thousands of lives and destroyed properties worth billions of naira in the state.⁴ It could be argued that there is no village in the state that has not witnessed the impact of cattle rustling and rural armed banditry. In Mada District, Gusau Local Government for example, the District Head stated that they witnessed over 12 different attacks by the bandits which claimed the lives of over 20 people and 1,500 heads of cattle were stolen at different times from 2014 to 2016.⁵ This did not include other assaults like rape, kidnapping and injuries inflicted on the people by the bandits. Thus, incidents like these occur virtually in all the villages in the state. It is, therefore, inappropriate to describe the security situation in Zamfara State as involving mainly cattle rustling, because all forms of criminality are involved.⁶ There is wanton destruction of live and properties and high level of human rights violations.⁷

Banditry has created a large number of destitute, orphans and widows in the rural areas of Zamfara State due to constant raiding, theft and raping. The village of Badarawa in Shinkafi Local Government Area, is another area hit by the bandits, the village head has compiled a list of 318 widows, orphans and destitute who lost loved ones in the various attacks carried out by the bandits in 2015 alone.⁸ The levels of attacks in these areas are less compared to Anka, Maru and Chafe that witnessed frequent attacks and recorded high casualties. In these areas, so many villages were raided and people killed indiscriminately; women were raped and livestock stolen by the bandits.⁹ Table 1:1 shows a rough estimate of the number of livestock stolen by the bandits in 2016 alone. The figures provided are far from the exact, because some cases were not officially reported to either the police or officials of the Miyyeti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN).

Table 1: Estimated Number of Livestock Rustled in the State in 2016

	Areas	Number of Livestock
1	Badarawa	Over 200
2	Bagega	Over 4,500
3	Dorayi	Over 2500
4	Filinga	Over 5,000
5	Gidan Kaso	1,455
6	Guru	270
7	Jangeme	Over 600
8	Kizara	Over 4,000
9	Lilo	90
10	Lingyado	Over 2,100
11	Madaba	106
12	Nasarawa Godal	Over 1000

³ .P.A.Olayoku, 'Trends and Pattern of Cattle Grazing and Rural Violence in Nigeria 2006-2014', *Nigeria Watch Proect,IFRA- Nigeria epapers Series*,2014,no.34

⁴ .O. Adeniyi ' The Zamfara State Killing Fields' This day Newspaper, 22nd September,2016

⁵ . Alhaji Samaila, Magajin Mada, District Head of Mada , Oral Interview, 80 years,13th August, 2016

⁶ Ahmed Tijjani, Officer in Charge of Immigration, Shinkafi Local Government, Oral Interview, 50 years 20th September, 2016

⁷ . Okoli A. and Okpaleke, F. N. 'Cattle Rustling and Dialectics of Security in Northern Nigeria' *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 3,2004*

⁸ . Alhaji Sirajo Na Makka Ibrahim District of Badarawa, Oral Interview, 30 years , 18th September, 2016

⁹ . Bello Abubakar Anka, Oral Interview in Anka town, 56 years, 20th September, 2016

13	Nasarawa Mai Layi	Over 500
14	Rukudawa	250
15	Shigama and Kwokeya	1,020
16	Tsabre	Over 3,500
17	Tungar Baushe	1,110
18	Unguwar Galadima	850
19	'Yar gada	230

Source: MACBAN, 2016

Moreover, insecurity has put Zamfara State at the top list of the major flashpoints of rural violence in Nigeria. This influenced strengthening and encouraging the vigilante group in the state. Thus, to further beef up the President Muhammadu Buhari launched Operation *Harbin Kunama* in April, 2016, with a view to fighting the bandits.

History of Vigilantism in Zamfara State

The idea of the informal security system called *Yan banga* in Hausa language has its root in the pre-colonial security system in what later became Nigeria. The main objective of this pre-colonial policing system was to ensure the enforcement and maintenance of norms, values and traditions. The task of community policing during this period was not difficult due to low level of crime. Members of the group were also few and the group had no organised leadership structure.¹⁰ The idea of vigilantism has a very long history in Zamfara, because the entire region was known for high levels of armed robbery, cattle rustling and all forms of rural banditry prior to the British conquest of Nigeria. This scale of insecurity led to the early formation of local vigilante groups in the area compared to its neighbours, Gobir, Kebbi and Katsina.¹¹

Unlike the Nigeria Police Force whose history dates back to 1930 when the regional police forces were amalgamated, the vigilante groups emerged as a single body in 1989 and became a full-fledged organisation in 1999 after its registration with Corporate Affairs Commission Companies and Allied Matters of Nigeria as an NGO.¹² The Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) is still crying for recognition by the Nigerian government. A bill to that effect has now passed first reading in the National Assembly. It is important to note that in a country like Nigeria bedevilled by different types of crises: ethnic, religious, political and even land- related conflicts. Vigilante groups stand to play a vital role in conflict prevention and mitigation.¹³ The underlying motive behind any form of vigilantism, according to Ogbozor, is to

Safeguard lives and properties in their communities...to complement security agencies, gather intelligence information and arrest and hand over suspected criminals to the police. Some groups combine security provisioning with social development activities (construction of roads, bridges and environmental sanitation facilities), while some engage in land- dispute settlement.¹⁴

The main objective of forming vigilante groups is to provide immediate security at the grassroots or rural areas. There has never been a time in Zamfara when the services of the vigilantes are more needed than this period of rural insecurity. It is the belief of an average person in the state that the vigilantes are up to the task of not only protecting them, but also providing them with security and a conducive atmosphere for peaceful co-existence.¹⁵ The reason for this optimism is that members of the group are drawn from the local community with track records and reputation for hard work and commitment to peace and tranquillity in the area. In fact, for one to be enlisted into the vigilante he has to undergo some screening, clearance and be recommended by his village or district head.¹⁶

The Zamfara State Government provides allowances to the vigilantes and also participates in the appointment of the state executive of the group. The sum of ₦2,250,000 is usually given to the vigilante as

¹⁰ . L. Fourchard, ‘ A New Name for an African Old Practice : Vigilantes in South-Western Nigeria’ *African: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.1, 2008 pp.16-40

¹¹ Dan Malam Shinkafi, Chairman Vigilante Group Shinkafi Local Government, 56 years Oral Interview, 25th August, 2016, Shinkafi Market, Dan Mallam is also the head of Militant vigilante group in the local government.

¹² . Interview with Malam Usman Muhammad Jahun...opcit

¹³ H.Adam, ‘Farmers-Pastoralists Conflict on the Jos-Plateau, Central Nigeria: Security Responses to Local Vigilante and the Nigerian State’, in *Conflict, Security and Development*, 2016, Vol.16 No.4, pp.365-385

¹⁴ . E. Ogbozor, ‘Understanding the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria...opict,p.18

¹⁵ A.Yanusa, Oral Interview at Shinkafi, 50 years, Member of Vigilante Group, 21st September, 2016

¹⁶ .A. Musa, Oral Interview at Shinkafi ,62 years, Member of the Vigilante Group, 21st September, 2016

monthly allowance by the state for the 14 local government areas.¹⁷ Moreover, in early 2013, the State Government donated 18 Toyota Hilux Jeeps and 1,700 motorcycles to the vigilante groups.¹⁸ The monthly allowance was partly used to fuel and maintain the vehicles and purchase working tools, such as uniforms, raincoats, sticks, flashlights, whistles, knives, machetes and locally made guns.¹⁹ Comparing the amount with the needs of the vigilantes, one would see that the amount was grossly inadequate for one Local Government, not to talk of the state as whole. The Chairman of the vigilante group in Bakura Local Government lamented that the amount was insufficient even for a small local government like Bakura with 18 districts and over 550 members.²⁰ According to the State Commander Alhaji Aliyu Mai Sango, there are 12,500 registered members.²¹ Besides, this main source of funding, a little stipend comes from some well-meaning individuals in the form of gifts and donations to the members.²²

In spite of this inadequate funding, the vigilante group was loyal to the State Government. Thus, the relationship between them and the state began to deteriorate when rural armed banditry was at its peak in 2014. During this period many people could neither sleep at home nor freely carry out their daily activities. It was anonymously reported that some villages could not observe Friday prayers in congregation without the presence of the vigilantes.²³ The security situation in most villages was tense and characterised by mutual suspicion and mistrust, which made the general public to more security conscious in respect of their surroundings and the community at large. However, one important issue which hindered the activities of the vigilantes was the failure of the State Government to promptly pay their allowances. According to the State Secretary of the group, their allowances began to be delayed to the following month. In some cases, it took two or three months before the release of one month's allowance.²⁴ The State Government also directed the vigilante executive not to participate in the joint patrols with the Police, Civil Defence and the Army, warning to those that joined the patrol that it was at their own peril.²⁵ Prior to this action by the State Government, the vigilantes worked hand and in hand with other security operatives, providing vital security tips for the Police, Army and Civil Defence Corps and communicating with mobile phones while on patrol. Although the vigilante have no sophisticated weapons, they make use of small arms such as Dane guns, (single-barrel, traditional guns for hunting), bows and arrows, sticks and knives, among others.²⁶

The role of the vigilantes in fight against rural banditry cannot be overemphasised. This is true because despite the fact that the Nigerian army and the Police are Federal institutions that draw recruits from different parts of the country. They may neither have clear understanding of the local terrain nor mastery of the language which are very critical to their success.²⁷ In spite of their contributions, the vigilantes were not given the adequate attention they deserve by the State Government. Consequently, most members of the vigilante group and commentators on the affairs of the State wanted to know what was responsible for the neglect of the vigilantes at this trying moment in the State. They also wanted to know why the State Government was not willing to co-opt the vigilante into the fight against cattle rustling in the State. These questions, no doubt, are still begging for answers.

Hence, if the state was sincere and committed to the fight against rural banditry, it would re-double its efforts in terms of financing and encouraging the vigilante groups. A clear example could be seen in Kaduna, Nassarawa, Niger and Plateau States which committed huge amounts of capital to the war against cattle rustling and rural armed banditry in their respective areas. This attitude of the state government has slowed the activities

¹⁷ . B. Danrani, State Financial Secretary of VGN Zamfara Branch , 51 years Oral Interview at Lambar Bakura, 13th August, 2016

¹⁸ Idem, it is also confirmed by Malam Usman Muhammad Jahun...opcit

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ It is important to note that Bello Danrani is the state financial secretary and also the chairman of Bakura Local Government Branch of the Vigilante, he argued that their activities is more of sacrifice to the community compared to its monetary gain.

²¹ Alh. Aliyu Mai Sango, State Commander of Vigilante Group, Zamfara State, 58 years, Oral Interview, Gusau, 15th August, 2016

²² Isah Abdullahi Member of the Vigilante Group, Dan Sadau Area, 48 years 5th of September, 2016

²³ . Bello Magaji, Member of the Vigilante Group, Birnin Magaji Area, 57 years, 20th March, 2016

²⁴ . B. Danrani, State Financial Secretary of VGN Zamfara Branch , 51 years Oral Interview at Lambar Bakura, 13th August, 2016

²⁵ Dan Mallam Shinkafi, State Secretary, 57 years Vigilante Group Zamfara State, Oral Interview, Shinkafi town, 20th September, 2016

²⁶ . Bello Magaji, Chairman Vigilante Group Zurmi Local Government, 52 years, 25th September, 2016

²⁷ . S. Omotola and I. Hassan, Herders and Farmers Association and Social Conflict in Northern Nigeria' in M. J. Kuna and J. Ibrahim, *Rural Banditry and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, Center of Democracy and Development, Abuja, 2015, pp.217-255

of the vigilantes and reduced their moral to its lowest ebb.²⁸ The reason why the government could not encourage the vigilantes may not be unconnected with the active participation of the group in the instigation of conflicts.

The Vigilante Groups and Rural Banditry

It is an irony for one to think that the vigilantes formed to ensure security of lives and properties of the people would eventually turn against them. In Zamfara State, the insecurity created by cattle rustling and rural banditry created the opportunity for the vigilante to either witch-hunt their old foes or amasses illegal wealth. Both the bandits and the *Fulbe* pastoralists complain of constant harassment, intimidation and confiscation of their properties unlawfully by the vigilantes.²⁹ Sometimes livestock and other properties retrieved from the bandits would not get to the rightful owners. In fact, some bad eggs amongst the vigilantes have turned the whole situation to a 'money making venture'.³⁰ It is this act of the vigilantes that a Fulani informant called 'legalised armed banditry in Zamfara'.³¹ What this invariably means is that the vigilantes are involved in a lot of injustices against herdsmen in the name of vigilantism, and no proper investigation has been carried out by the relevant authorities. Most members of the group, until recently, were not exposed to any form of security training. Therefore, what they know best is to apprehend an accused person and brutally subject him to torture, which may result to death. Such gross miscarriages of justice characterised the activities of these groups in Zamfara State. According to Momale,

The worst cases of negative influence of the vigilante groups were reported in Zamfara State...., in these areas, there were allegations of extra-judicial killings of pastoralists; confiscation of livestock; burning and looting of pastoral households and forced evictions perpetrated by the vigilantes.³²

It was this type of jungle justice that escalated rural armed banditry in Zamfara State. Since most members of the vigilante are Hausa and most of the bandits are Fulani, the conflict at times takes ethnic dimensions. Some of my informants claimed that the crises brought back the old animosity between the *Fulbe* and *Habe* people in the state and also increased anti-*Fulbe* sentiments across different local government areas in the state. Therefore, the bandits who were victims of this high handedness of the vigilante, declared war against the vigilante group in 2014.³³ In most of the attacks carried out by the bandits, the prime targets were the vigilantes and their cohorts. A Divisional Police Officer confirmed that the conflict started between the vigilantes and the bandits before it extended to the rural communities in the state. Members of the vigilante groups also confirmed the fact that they are the 'chief targets' and victims of rural armed banditry.

In September, 2013, nine vigilantes were killed in Tsanu village in Zurmi LGA. The bandits were said to have clearly stated during this attack on the villagers that they were not after anyone but the vigilante members. They maintained that the war against the vigilantes had just started and would continue until none of them is in existence'.³⁴ Bello Mashayar Giwa, a vigilante who had just recovered from a gun-shot wound inflicted on him by the bandits, also lamented that 'they have fallen prey to the bandits'.³⁵ Another vigilante who spoke on condition of anonymity, stated that the bandits are on a vengeance mission because of the gross extra-judicial killings of people accused of stealing or cattle rustling. He accused some of his colleagues of not properly investigating accused persons before taking action'.³⁶

The worst attack of the bandits against the vigilantes occurred on 7th April, 2014, in Yar Galadima in Dan Sadau Emirate of Maru Local Government Area. The bandits came on over 50 motorcycles, each carrying three persons, and stormed a meeting organised by the vigilantes and instantly killed over 200 people; over 50 people sustained serious injuries.³⁷ This was seen as the most horrifying in the history of rural banditry in

²⁸ . Tsoho Mai Kwasa, Chairman Vigilante Group Maru Local Government, 58 years, 25th August, 2016

²⁹ . Ibrahim Isah Fulani herdsman ,58 years, Tsafe Local Government, 15th October, 2016

³⁰ Bello Ibrahim, Oral Interview, 45 year, Badarawa Village, Shinkafi Local Government, 15th August,201

³¹ Manu Abubakar Maniya, Oral Interview, Isa town, 52 years 20th September, 2016

³² . Momale,S.B, Changing Methods of Animal Husbandry, Cattle Rustling and Rural banditry in Nigeria, in M. J. Kuna and J. Ibrahim, *Rural Banditry and Conflict in Northern Nigeria...*, p.100

³³ . Musa Jibrin, Shinkafi, Oral Interview, Shinkafi town, 25th August, 2016

³⁴ Bello Sani, Member of Vigilante Group, Dan Sadau Area, 15th September, 2016

³⁵ . Interview with Bello Mashayar Giwa, Daily Trust, Monday, October, 7, 2013 ' How bandits terrorized Zamfara Villagers'

³⁶ Anonymous informant

³⁷ Bello Sani, Member Vigilante Group....idem, according to him the meeting was summoned by the state chapter of the vigilante with the view to discussing new security strategy to be adopted against rural banditry.

northern Nigeria.³⁸ The official response of the state government over this mass killing of the vigilante members was nothing to write home about, because the victims of this attack were partly blamed by the government for holding an unauthorised meeting.³⁹ This further confirmed to the vigilantes that the state was not in their support because the aim of the meeting was to discuss how best to address security challenges in the state.⁴⁰ This single action sent a danger signal to the vigilantes and also questioned the sincerity of the state's commitment to peace and harmony in the rural areas.⁴¹ Since then, the vigilante groups have reduced their commitment and actions against the bandits, but this did not stop the bandits from killing their members.⁴² This was because, amongst the vigilantes, there were those who advocated a violent approach in dealing with the bandits; and even when the state government reduced its commitment to the vigilantes, such vigilantes were still proactive in the fight against the bandits. Unfortunately, some casual observers regard the downturn in vigilante activity as either a conspiracy or the result of fear of the bandits. This situation brought serious suspicion of and bashing against the leadership of the vigilante, particularly from those proactive members who advocated a violent approach against the bandits. The end- result of this was a serious fracas that eventually led to the emergence of the militant wing of the vigilante in the early part of 2014.

Militant Vigilante Group

The inability of the Zamfara State government to adequately address the challenges of rural armed banditry created an opportunity for the informal security sector to have a stake in the security apparatus of the state. A militant vigilante group (MVG), called *Yan Sakai*, has just emerged in Zamfara State. The word *Yan sakai* simply means *volunteers*, people committed to protecting the territorial integrity of their community against hoodlums, bandits and armed robbers. Some members of the MVG were disenchanted members of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) as well as other people in the community who are uncomfortable with the nonchalant attitude of the state government to the entire security situation in the state.⁴³

This idea of the MVG started in Maru, Anka and Birnin Magaji local governments in 2013.⁴⁴ This was because of the high rate of cattle rustling and rural armed banditry in these places. The idea behind the formation of the MVG was to checkmate the activities of the bandits. At the early stage of its formation, the group worked hand in hand with the VGN and the general public regarded the MVG as a mere reinforcement and part of the general security operatives in the local government areas.⁴⁵ It was from these areas that the idea of MVG radiated to other places. The group later broke away from the main VGN in 2015 and established an independent group with branches in every local government in the state.⁴⁶ The MVG has an administrative structure akin to that of the VGN, with a Chairman, Secretary and PRO across different local government areas of the state.⁴⁷ It is pertinent to note that in some places all the members of VGN adopted a violent approach against the bandits. As a result, VGN members from Ndalumu, Kamarawa and Bargaja simply joined the MVG.⁴⁸

The idea to form the MVG emanated from the traditional rulers who believed that 'the only end to this perpetual violence by the bandits is to counter it with a greater violence'.⁴⁹ Therefore, several meetings were held between the traditional rulers at the village level with their respective VGN members on how to transform the main VGN members into a militant wing.⁵⁰ Opinions were divided among members particularly, the state

The approach of the bandit to meeting shows that they have privilege information about the nature, venue and issues to be addressed during the meeting.

³⁸ . Omotola S. and Hassan I, *Herders and Farmers Association and Social Conflict in Northern Nigeria...opcit*

³⁹ .S. Olaniyi, *The Zamfara Killing Field...opcit*

⁴⁰ Bello Sani Oral Interview...idem

⁴¹ . Muhammadu Sani, 45 years, Member of the Vigilante Group, Oral Interview Tsafe Local Government, 25th September, 2016

⁴² Usman Muhammad Badarawa alias (Mani Dan Gora), 58 years Chairman of Militant Vigilante Group, Badarawa District, 19th September, 2016

⁴³ Abdullahi Yanusa 50 years, Member of the Militant Vigilante Group, Badarawa Area, Shinkafi, 19th October, 2016

⁴⁴ Sergeant Abdullah Isah, 48 years, Police Officer, Maru Division, 25th September, 2016

⁴⁵ . Isah Abubakar, MVG member, 45 years Maru town 25th September, 2016

⁴⁶ . Manu Mai Daji, 52 years, member of the MVG, Oral Interview, Birnin Magaji, 13th August, 2016

⁴⁷ .Bello Maru, 51 years, Member of the Militant Vigilante Group, Maru Local Government, 25th September, 2016

⁴⁸ Buhari Hassan, 47 years, Member of the Militant Vigilante Group, Bargaja Village, 4th August, 2016

⁴⁹ .Salisu Ajiya, 70 years, Ajiyan Badarawa, Oral Interview, Badarawa Village, 19th August, 2016

⁵⁰ . Ahmed Abubakar Shinkafi, 47 years, Security Personnel, Oral Interview, 18th August, 2016. According to him he attended most of the security meetings, issues discuss at most of the meetings include, the response of

executive members of the VGN. The first group argued that the vigilantes should operate within the ambit of the law which stipulates that all alleged criminals should be handed over to the appropriate authorities for the law to take its natural course. This group further argued that the VGN should maintain absolute loyalty to only the state government.⁵¹ Unfortunately, this group was over-powered by the second group, supported by some traditional rulers who were of the view that the best approach was to fight the bandits back. Instead of apprehending them and handing them over to appropriate authorities, they should rather be brutally killed instantly.⁵² This second group expressed dissatisfaction with the approach of the state government, the Police and other related security operatives to the security situation in the state.

There is wisdom in either of the arguments. Those who advocated justice and respect for human rights anchored their view on the principle of fairness and with the intension of getting a lasting solution to the problem. According to them, taking up arms against the bandits will only aggravate the security situation rather than reduce the menace.⁵³ Though not satisfied with the state's approach to the security situation, the first group was still loyal to the government. They received orders and directives from the state government in spite of the poor funding and lack of encouragement from the state.⁵⁴ Those that advocates of human rights' were seen as collaborators, weak and even traditional enemies of peace and harmony in their communities.⁵⁵

The second group spearheaded by Village heads, District heads and some Emirs have the feelings that in a situation where the state fails to carry out its primary responsibility, it is better for people to take that responsibility into their hands. In this light, many people who are the victims of rural armed banditry supported this view and worked towards its actualisation. The outcome was the adoption of MVG as radical wing of the VGN with serious ideological difference on how to approach issues of peace and security in the state. This new wing of the vigilante derived membership across different strata, traditional rulers, young and able youth, hunters, cattle herders, farmers, members of VGN and other related victims of rural armed banditry.⁵⁶

The MVG shares certain features in common with the bandits when it comes to the issue of violence. Just as the bandits possessed certain super-natural powers so also the MVG. Both of them are mostly youth at their prime ages and possessed local charms that made some of them invisible. Sharp objects like knife, sword, machete and dagger could hardly penetrate these people.⁵⁷ The brought to the fore orthodoxy warfare system, most of the confrontations between the bandits and members of MVG revolve around the use of different and assorted charms against each as a defence system. In fact, orthodoxy security system is an area that deserved serious attention by security experts, because most of the combats were influenced and determine by the nature of this form of security system.

MVG or *Yan Sakai* as the name connotes signifies the highest form of sacrifices, which is sacrificing one's life for the prosperity of his community. By extension members of the MVG most always be vigilant wherever they are. In the middle of the night while everyone in the village is asleep the MVG is awake policing the area and even during the day he most always be on the alert.⁵⁸ It is so because the bandits could visit and strike the village anytime. In fact, the moment one is enlisted in to MVG he is automatically regarded a hero in his community, at the same time entered the 'black list' of the bandits.⁵⁹ Meaning members of the MVG are well known by the bandits, they know them by their names and where they come from, including some nasty comments people are making about them. It is important to note that in each village or community as we have seen elsewhere the bandits have their agents who serve as their collaborators. They provide all relevant information, situation reports to the bandits and who owns what number of livestock in the villages.⁶⁰

Therefore, in each attack carried out by the bandits the first targets and of course victims are members the MVG. It is for this reason that one needs to stress the fact that the moment somebody joins the union he is likely to kill or be killed, because at the peak of the conflict in 2015 members of the militant group were busy

the state government towards security situation in the state, constant attacks from the bandits and the way forward. The outcome of such meetings influenced the emergence of the militant wing of the vigilantes.

⁵¹ . Bello Dan Inno Maradun, 42 years, vigilante member, Maradun Local Government, 10th July, 2016

⁵² Sirajo Na Makka District Head of Badarawa ...idem

⁵³ . This view was expressed by an elder statesman Malam Yakubu Bungudu, who has warned the vigilante severally against armed confrontation against the bandits, Oral Interview, 65 years, Tudun Wada Area Gusau, 20th July, 2016

⁵⁴ .Aliyu Mai Sango, State Commander of the VGN, Zamfara State...,idem

⁵⁵ . Samaila Aliyu, 43 years Member of the Vigilante Group Anka Local Government, Oral Interview, 22nd August, 2016

⁵⁶ . Bello Isah, Member of the MVG in Bakura Local Government, 48 years, 22nd June, 2016

⁵⁷ Musa Ibrahim, Member of the MVG, Badarawa Village, 45 years, 19th August, 201

⁵⁸ Idiris Musa...idem

⁵⁹ Hassan Muhammed...,idem

⁶⁰ . Umar Magaji Anka, Member of MVG, 47 years, Anka Local Government, 29th August, 2016

fighting several wars with the bandits. A member of this group recalled that he participated in more than fifteen (15) wars fought against the bandits across different areas of the state.⁶¹

There is an interconnection between the different *Yan Sakai* in Zamfara State; this is in form of communication and exchange of ideas. Since they all have a common interest on how to fight a common enemy, then there are mutual co-operations amongst them. The *Yan Sakai* of any village could be invited and mobilised to defend an area outside their immediate community.⁶² The MVG members of Bini, Tungar Rakumi and Burwai from Kanoma district often travel a long distance, to as far as Ruwan Mesa or Mutungi in Dan Sadau Emirate to offer assistance to their fellow MVG members.⁶³

It will not be an overstatement for one to say that large part of 2014/2015 was characterised by intense rural violence in Zamfara state. To most of the informants interviewed during this research, the reduction in rural armed banditry and cattle rustling in Zamfara has less to do with the 'Operation *Harbin Kunama*' lunched by President Muhammadu Buhari, but the remarkable success recorded MVG and the support given to the group by village and district heads.⁶⁴ While looking at this success people tend to ignore completely the high level of human right violation and extra judicial killings carried out by the MVG. These are too numerous to be mention here, but what needs to be highlighted is that, the human right violation and other related abuses warrants a different research on its own. But let us just cite an example with Shinkafi Local Government Area.

The people of this area will agree with me that the operation of MVG is the worst form of human right violation and extra judicial killings they have ever witnessed in their recent history. The memory of how the MVG use to storm the market on Wednesdays just to identify and kill people accused of cattle rustling is still fresh in them.⁶⁵ An informant confirmed to me that he has never seen a worst thing in his entire life of fifty five (55) years like how the MVG cut human beings into pieces in the market square and burn them to ashes' in public without any fear.⁶⁶ It was only after the first and second public execution of people that the entire community frown at it, and then the MVG decided to look for a 'better place', located directly opposite to the livestock market called Shinkafi *Kara* Market, along Isa- Shinkafi road. The place is a farmland of late Na-Maisha Shinkafi and it is basically *Fadama* land that contains water during and after rainy season.⁶⁷

On market days those that have strong mind shrouded by anti-*Fulbe* sentiment due visit this seen to observe how their people were publically executed.⁶⁸ It must be emphasised here that the Fulani basically constitutes large part if not all of the victims. The reason why this was done has been explained elsewhere in the work. But what needs to be clarified is that after this unpardonable injustice against people accused of banditry my informant reveals that until recently no Fulani man could be found in Shinkafi *Kara* market. Prior to this period, the Fulani are proud of the market and one could even argue that it was a Fulani established and Fulani dominated market.⁶⁹ Some of the informants went to the extent of saying that Fulani deserted completely not only the market but even the entire town. The chairman of MVG Shinkafi Local Government stated that most of MVG members came from the neighbouring villages to carry out this execution. These people came with their comprehensive list of accused cattle rustlers and bandits and the moment they are identified then faced the consequences.⁷⁰

An eye witness informed me that eighteen (18) people were executed in two weeks. The methods of the execution varies from people to people, for those that have charms that could not be killed with gun, the MVG used sword, dagger or machete on them. While in a situations where all these failed they will resort to the use of heavy stone to smash their heads.⁷¹ What this means by extension is that the moment one is apprehended and taken there they most ensure that he is killed. After which all the bodies will be assembled in one place and set a blazed. This execution centre is known in Shinkafi as 'Human abattoir' at the apex of the conflict in late 2015 and early 2016. The most pertinent question any observer will ask about this gross miscarriage of justice is that where is the government, what is the role of the formal security personnel and more importantly what is the position and response of the traditional rulers on this episode. These are question left to the readers to ponder

⁶¹ . Ahmadu Sarkin Karma, Oral Interview, 40 years Ndalumu Village, 20th October, 2016

⁶² Bello Haruna, Oral Interview, 52 years, Bargaja Village, 4th August, 2016

⁶³ Idem

⁶⁴ . Isah Alkali, Member of MVG, 50 years Tudun Wada Gusau, 25th October, 2016

⁶⁵ Yunusa Abdullahi, 50 years, Member of the MVG, Shinkafi Town, 18th September, 2016

⁶⁶ . Bello Mai Dawa, 55 years Member of the VGN, Shinkafi town, 18th September, 2016

⁶⁷ . Idem

⁶⁸ Idem

⁶⁹ Bello Isah Shinkafi, 45 years, Member of the VGP, Shinkafi town 19th September, 2016

⁷⁰ Alhaji Dan Mallam Shinkafi, 55 years, Chairman of the MVG, Shinkafi town, 20th September, 2016

⁷¹ . Ahmed Tijjani, 47 years, Oral Interview, Shinkafi town, 19th September, 2016

deeply. Although by the nature and orientation of the MVG they offer what they called voluntary service to the community yet the issue of funding is very central to their operation.

It is a common knowledge that for members of group to effectively carried out their assigned duties they need the working tools like local gun, machetes, knife, whistle, daggars and more importantly means of transportation from one place to another for vigilantism. It is not realistic for the members to provide both the services and also procure small arms and light weapons. Therefore the entire community has to pay the price of the services provided. The main source of this funding is the village and district heads, without which the whole process will be fruitless.⁷² These people mobilised resources through fund raising for the up keep of the union. Rich and wealthy individuals were also taxed certain amount of money. The poor farmer is not left behind because provision of security is a collective responsibility he most either form part of the MVG or provide material support to the operation of the militant vigilante. According to one village head, every Friday 10-12 pm is usually period for their security meetings with members. Issues discuss in most of meetings are on how to approach and strategized what they consider 'war against the bandits' and also fund raising.⁷³ Most of the villagers see the members of MVG as heroes, true defenders of their father's land. It is highly prestigious for one to be a member of this radical wing because generation yet unborn will remember him as a great warrior.

II CONCLUSION

The problem of cattle rustling and rural armed banditry was under rated at its inception about a decade ago in Zamfara state. Most of the security operatives showed little concern about the potential threat of this little quagmire until it became a serious nightmare in 2014. The dream of a common men in the rural areas is that the government will provide them with security, but when that proves merely impossible they relied on the vigilante group who are financially incapacitated, technically and even lacks confidence on the part of the general public. The last resort was to form up private security outfit that engaged the bandits in constant and perpetual armed conflict that claimed several lives and destroyed properties worth billion of naira. Even though, there were several attempts by the State Government to ban the activities and operations of this militant vigilante, but little success was achieved in that direction, simply because there were accusations in some quarters that the State Government is not up to its responsibilities. The major findings of this paper is that the MVG group were partly responsible for the prolongation of the conflict in Zamfara state and no meaningful peace talk and lasting solution to this conflict will be achieved without disbanding of both VGN and MVG groups in the state.

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⁷² . Alh. Sirajo Na Makka Ibrahim, Village Head of Badarawa.....,

⁷³ Idem