

HERDSMEN ATTACKS IN NIGERIA'S SOUTHEAST AND THE DIALECTICS OF STATE BEHAVIOUR.

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Abstract

The Southeast of Nigeria have witnessed one form of herdsmen attack or the other in recent times. This paper interrogates the emerging trend of adverse herdsmen activities in the five Southeast states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. What is the nature or pattern of adverse herdsmen activities in the region and to what extent do their activities constitute trespasses and violent invasions? Using the instruments of key informant interview (KII) and select case situations, the study examines the specific patterns of interface between adverse herdsmen activities, southeast communities and state behaviour in relation to trespasses and violent invasions of communities. Our findings suggest that herdsmen operate as if they are above the laws in Nigeria; and that the state in Nigeria, particularly the instrumentality of governance appears to show no serious interest in curbing herdsmen excesses by forestalling their attacks, and ensuring that justice prevails for the victims of attacked communities in the region.

Key words: Armed herdsmen, Open grazing, Nigeria's Southeast, State behaviour and Trespasses.

Introduction

In the face of sweeping attacks by armed herdsmen experienced by communities in Southeast Nigeria, as disturbing and alarming the situation is especially for attacked communities, there is increasing doubt on the ability of the government to actually rise to the occasion of providing security and ensuring the safety of lives and property of the citizenry. The fact that one attack is followed by another in quick succession, within the Southeast does not help matters. In each of these states, there is at least a community within the state that has come under the attack or threat of attack by herdsmen.

It important to point out straightaway that, the herders, who are totally Fulani people are not indigenes in the Southeast; they are migrants from the northern parts of Nigeria. Some are even from outside the shores of Nigeria, which is the more reason attacks or threat of attacks by herdsmen in the Southeast is rightly considered a trespass or an invasion. The slow but steady breach of peace by herdsmen in Southeast is most

unexpected, the attacks are oftentimes beyond imagination and very disturbing (Odogwu, Okafor, Adegbuyi, and Tule, 2016). The Chairman of Abia State Farmers Association; Mr. Dunlop Okoro, provided an insight into the nature and pattern of invasion and raiding of farming communities by herdsmen in the Southeast. On the source of the altercations, Mr. Dunlop Okoro, revealed during the peace accord signed on September 8, 2016 between herdsmen and farmers in Abia state, that there had always been peace between farmers and herdsmen until the herdsmen started carrying arms and grazing in farms instead of along the roads and uncultivated lands (Onuoha, 2016). "It is no longer fashionable for herdsmen to restrain their cattle and sheep to the outskirts of any community". Literally speaking, Fulani herdsmen now "take their herds right into people's door posts and backyard, eating up vegetable and other behind-the-house farm produce, to the chagrin but seeming helplessness of the community people" (Odogwu, E. et al, 2016:37).

To deepen our findings, the following question was posed to our informants; "How would you assess government's response"? Do herdsmen wilfully trespass farmlands and even desecrate family compounds in the name of grazing their cattle? This elicits another level of response from the indigenous communities whose farms and homes have been invaded in the name of open grazing. What is the impact of the response, significant or not, on the herdsmen to attack. What is the nature of the attack: sudden, and unexpected manner? What is the place of the silence of law enforcement agents in the face of herdsmen destructive activities on farm lands? Does it appear to have encouraged herders to be more daring, when questioned by host communities? This study sets out to uncover the role of government in the face of abuse and trespass by herdsmen and how such role enhances self-help, on both sides. Curiously, government's response to herdsmen violence remains unclear and in fact appear to encourage further attacks.

Conceptual Issues and Theoretical Framework

This paper engages the Rentier State Theory- RST, as its framework of analysis. The RST offers an insightful analysis of the character of Nigerian state and so presents interesting understanding of struggle for resources and Fulani herdsmen organised violence, but more importantly, why the state behaves in the manner it does in dealing with herdsmen attacks in the Southeast. Almaz (2015:24) defined rentier state as "a state where the rents are paid by foreign actors, where they accrue directly to the state and where only a few are engaged in the generation of this rent the majority being involved only in the distribution or utilization of it". For Gary, (2011:1) "Rentier State Theory seeks to explain the impacts of external payments or rents on state-society relations and governance". Furthermore, Gary (2011) described RST as one that seeks to explain state-society relations in states that generate a large proportion of their income from rents.

The implication is that, where the state generates most or all of its income from rents there are certain peculiar patterns of relationship in the society and between the society

and the state. As observed by Gary (2011), "since the state receives this external income and distributes it to the society, it is relieved of having to impose taxation, which in turn means that it does not have to offer concessions to society such as a democratic bargain or a development strategy". In addition to the above, rentier state "try to prevent any anarchy with stiffer police and security measures, creating the atmosphere of fear and terror". Even with that measure, because of inadequate distribution of wealth, inequality, discrimination and injustice, "none of these governments can benefit from a long term sustainability" (Kouchaksarael and Bustami, 2012:37).

Generally, three major effect of rentierism on a state have been identified by Kouchaksarael and Bustami, (2012). They are (a) Effect on the state itself (b) Effect on the economy (c) Effect on the relationship between the state and the society. Gary (2011) has identified the three phases of RST. The first phase he called the classical RST and lasted between 1980s and early 1990s. That phase paraded Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani as the most vocal proponents of the theory. The second phase emerged because of the weaknesses associated with the classical phase and tried to improve upon the ground breaking works of the classical era. Gary (2011:12) categorized the second phase into two of specialized and conditional RST. This phase he noted, is important because "for some scholars, RST needed to incorporate the pre-rent state-society dynamics into an analysis of post-rent political order and relationships and problems of state formation needed to be included in considerations of specific states' experience". Moreover, the second phase of RST "sort to refine the theory to account for the structural weaknesses or explanatory generalizations that hampered the early literature" (Gary, 2011). The third and last phase is "late rentierism". The need for this phase arose because of changes that have occurred in the political and economic landscape of some rentier Arab countries. Though the states are still rentier, but rentierism has become more sophisticated as the states have matured and new threats have emerged (Gary, 2011).

The three phases of Rentier State Theory identified by Gary (2011) tend to take care of the theory's criticisms in each preceding phase. However, RST faces challenges with explaining how and why countries like "Canada, Norway and Botswana, all show that natural resources discoveries can have positive impacts on countries". The implication is that such instances tends to "contradict the resource curse paradigm" (Ozyavuz and Schmid, 2015). When this theory is applied to the Nigerian situation vis a vis herdsmen violence in the Southeast, how the state is addressing it and the impact of the response on the crisis, the struggle over resources between farmers and herdsmen, government's directionless approach, the state's lack of firm grip over the machineries of force within its territory, Nigeria's dependence on oil rent and the country's level of underdevelopment despite the humongous availability of human and material resources. The character of Nigerian state is consistent with the character of a rentier state. The herdsmen organised

violence in the Southeast and the State's seeming inability to address the sweeping violent attacks by herdsmen, are evidences to the rentier disposition of Nigerian state.

Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, a total sample picked for Key Informant Interview of identified selected case situations across communities within the Southeast for the period under study, is eight. The respondents acted in response to the six case situations across communities located in the five Southeast states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Each situation has one informant who provided subterranean insight, most often, first-hand information, to each case. However, for case situations in Enugu there were three respondents considering the intensity of Enugu state attacks while the others have one each except the Ogbaru case, in Anambra which was assigned two respondents. Furthermore, this study also relied on reports and findings in national dailies and other sources like internet publications to generate its data.

Select Case Situations

Six communities are involved in our selected case situations. The communities are Nimbo in Uzo-uwani LGA of Enugu state, Attakwu in Enugu state, Abam in Abia state, Ogbaru in Anambra state, Akokwa in Imo state and Mbom in Ebonyi state. To identify the dominant pattern of herdsmen trespass and violence in Southeast states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, the specific character of each case is traced and narrated below, from Case One to Case Six

Case One: Government Response During and After Nimbo Attack. Nimbo community is a village in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu state. It was attacked by herdsmen in the morning hours of April 25, 2016. A survivor of the attack by the herdsmen on April 25, 2016 in Nimbo, Mr. Obata Nnadozie, narrated that the attack took place as early as 6am on that fateful day, just after the community's vigilante and police officers on duty have dispersed. Another survivor Mr. Ezeugwu who was interviewed by the *Daily Sun* on his hospital bed gave an account of the problem between Fulani herdsmen and the community. He narrated that in 2015, Fulani herdsmen hired Fulani mercenaries who were fond of intimidating the community farmers and destroying their crops. Then eventually in July, the herdsmen killed two members of their community; Parosha and Ozoemena, after which they asked them to leave the community and they left. Although the community became apprehensive and suspected that the herdsmen may be up to something sinister when they later left Adani, a nearby community without being asked to leave. In Nimbo, the community never saw them or their cows until their attack on the community on 25 April, 2016, Mr. Ezeugwu recalled (Omegoh and Ani, 2016).

The Igwe of Nimbo, His Royal Highness Igwe John Akor, who also granted interview to pressmen, remarked that the community has been having problems with the herdsmen

over the manner they graze their cattle in farmlands owned by members of the community. The Igwe said, "Our community is known for farming but when they come with their cattle, they would enter into the farms and destroy all the crops. They have killed about four people in the past but we have never killed any of them or their cattle. In fact, we have never fought them. We only asked them to leave our community since they cannot stay without destroying our crops". The Igwe further said he was sent text message by the herdsmen informing him of their plan to attack the community. Other members of the community, who responded to interview, such as Ifeoma Ezeako and Ifeanyi Okeji, narrated that the attack took them totally by surprise. They recounted that it was the shooting by the herdsmen that alerted them of their invasion of the community (Omegoh, and Ani, 2016). Worst still, Chris (2016) reported the return of rampaging herdsmen to Nimbo and their threat to unleash more terror on the community after raping about six women. This is coming after a committee of inquiry has been set up by the Governor of Enugu state to look into the immediate and remote causes of the previous attack, as well as other security measures like aerial surveillance and ban of night cattle grazing in the state.

Case Two: The State's Silence and Attakwu Case. The Attakwu attack which happened barely four months after the Nimbo Uzo-Uwani attack, also coincidentally happened in Enugu state. Attakwu community is a village in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Enugu state. In August, 2016, Fulani herdsmen attacked a family house in Attakwu, Akegbe Ugwu community, in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Enugu state following altercation between them and owners of the compound. The attack led to the death of a seminarian Mr. Lazarus Nwafor, a native of Orlu in Imo state, student of Spiritan International School of Theology, who returned from Apostolic work at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Amagu.

The attack was launched at Ogbodo Nwarum family house around mid-night. An account of the event revealed that Fulani herdsmen struck at the family house because the previous day when they grazed their cattle through the compound, their action provoked some uncomplimentary comments from the pregnant wife of the landlord. This irked the Fulani herdsmen so badly that they threatened to deal with them. At night they entered the compound and gained access to the rooms through the ceiling, eventually killing the seminarian on the spot and injuring four other people including the pregnant woman who later died (Obi, 2016, Odogwu, 2016).

Case Three: Trespass and Invasion in the Case of Abam. Ndi Okereke Abam community in Ovukwu area of Abia state had problem with Fulani herdsmen that led to seven people sustaining varying degrees of injury. Accordingly, the herdsmen invaded the villagers' farm lands, destroyed their crops; particularly rice and cassava, as well as engaged in a violent fisticuff with the villagers when they were challenged, thereby injuring about seven persons. The President General of the community lamented that the incidence started

“when one of our men went to his farm with his family members to harvest their rice, he saw that the herdsmen had led their cattle to feed on the heap of already harvested grains. Instead of heeding the pleas of the owners to take their cattle away from their harvested rice, the marauders drew machetes and inflicted several cuts on the farmers” (Okoli, 2016). The farmers then raised an alarm and the community came to their rescue.

Our key informant, a member of the Executive arm of Abia state government who hails from Abam community lamented that even at his level; there is nothing he can do to ensure the safety of his people because, “the security apparatuses are under the firm control of the Federal Government and it is hard to understand what the government is doing to effectively secure the lives and property of Abam people”. We met a journalist based in Umuahia who visited Abam after the attack. He was so angry that he essentially denounced the existence of any government in Abia state and Nigeria. “Where are the herdsmen who were eating up people’s harvest, did you hear they were arrested? Are they hiding?” he queried thunderously. “As we speak, the herdsmen are still moving freely in Abam with impunity and maybe grazing on a cultivated farmland right now. So tell me, do you, Mr. Researcher, think there is government in this country?” The respondents confirmed that seven people were injured and that it was the villagers who came to the rescue of the farmers whose harvested grains were being eaten up by cattle, before they tried to drive the cattle away but were attacked by herdsmen with machete.

Case Four: The Ogbaru Experience. Iyiowa Odekpe Okoti is in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, reputed for their yam produce. There, Mr. Stephen’s farm was invaded by herdsmen, his attempt to resist them was met with an attack, leading to his son sustaining serious machete cut on the forehead. Our informant for this case situation, who is a Personal Assistant to a legislator in Anambra state and also from Atani in Ogbaru Local government, led the researcher to the victim of the attack. When we met and interviewed Mr. Stephen, he narrated that upon invasion of his farm by herdsmen, he asked them to lead the cattle out of his cultivated farm but he was ignored and he continued to plead and got no response until the herd advanced further into the farm and started plundering his cultivated farm. So he made efforts to drive the cows out of his farm and was succeeding until the herdsmen attacked him not only pushing him out of the way but attempted to drag him along with them. His shouting drew the attention of his nearby sons who swiftly came to his rescue. One of his sons was attacked with machete cut on the forehead See the accompanying picture. The three herdsmen were later subdued and rounded up with the help of the youths of the village. The situation would have degenerated, but for the intervention of some officers of the Nigerian Army and Nigerian Navy, who were on patrol around the waterway. While no life was lost, four people were hospitalized. Mr. Stephen’s son who received machete cut from the herdsmen and the three herdsmen who sustained injuries from beating by the village youths. All four at the time of this interview, were

receiving treatment in the hospital. whose farm was invaded and his son attacked by herdsmen with machete

Picture 1: VICTIM OF MACHETE CUT ATTACK BY HERDERS IN IYIOWA ODEKPE, OGBARU LGA.



Source: Mr. Stephen (The son of Mr. Stephen, the Ogbaru farmer)

Case Five: Akokwa Case Situation In Akokwa, Ideato Local Government Area of Imo state, there was a case in August 2016 involving Hausa-Fulani man and host community youths. The Hausa-Fulani man killed two women and the village youth responded by killing four Hausa-Fulanis. News media sources like Nkwokpara, and Alozie, (2016) reported that the Police confirmed the death of three people only, in the crisis. Although some other dailies reported that at least seven people were killed. The root cause of the issue leading to the violence could not be established by news reporters, nor the identity of the Hausa-Fulani man who triggered the violence, confirmed.

Our Imo state Key Informant 1, who was visiting her grandmother in Akokwa at the time of the incident, however, because she was not at the scene of the incident called Ak 1 to assist her. Our informant 1 in Imo and her assistant confirmed that it was seven people

that died. Neither of them could say precisely why the Hausa-Fulani man was chasing the girl who he eventually killed with one elderly woman. While some national dailies reported that the Hausa-Fulani man killed himself, our respondents refuted that claim. According to them, “the youths of the village rounded the man, dragged him to the village square and killed him”. They however agreed that the Hausa-Fulani was a herdsman and was possibly chasing the girl whom he later killed, to exploit her sexually. Four other Hausa-Fulanis who were killed were on the run when they were caught by the angry youths of Akokwa and killed at the village square, they narrated.

Case Six: Mbom Case Situation. On March 22, 2017, some aged women staged an attention commanding protest in Abakaliki, the Ebonyi state capital over the rape of Mrs Alice Ogbonna; a 70-year old woman to coma, by a Fulani herdsman at gun point. The sad incident happened in Mbom, in Isu community of Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi state. The protesting women led by Florence Okoro when addressing the press noted that “the herdsmen have been raping us and our daughters and that is why we came to protest to the government to come to our rescue because we have had enough of this inhuman treatment from them. The government should help us because we are dying of hunger caused by these herdsmen who have destroyed our crops and other property”. On her part, Mrs Okoro remarked as follows; “if we cook our food, they will come inside our house and take it and eat... the worst is that the herdsmen rape us in front of our husbands” (Okutu, 2017). What can be more humiliating and devastating! Although the leader of herdsmen in Ebonyi state; Ardo Bello has denied the allegation. He went further to state that the accused herdsman has lost a cow to the community (Okutu, 2017). Is Mr. Bello’s response a justification for the atrocious activities of the murderous herdsmen in Mbom, where the women have taken their own destinies in their own hands to demand for the respect of their humanity, decry the abuses by herdsmen and awaken the government to its responsibility to protect the lives and properties of citizens. Our Ebonyi informant reported that in parts of Izza, a community near Abakaliki in Ebonyi state, Fulani herdsmen attack and kill local farmers, while farmers also mobilize and killed them, a situation he said has “tamed the herdsmen in that village”. Resort to self-help does appear, in this instance, the antidote for the herdsmen’s excesses.

Analysis and Interpretation

The import is that herdsmen wilfully trespass farmlands and even desecrate family compounds in the name of grazing their cattle. This practice elicits another level of response from the indigenous communities whose farms and homes have been invaded in the name of open grazing and then the response significant or not, energizes the herdsmen to attack, in a most sudden, and unexpected manner. The silence of law enforcement agents in the face of herdsmen destructive activities on farm lands appears to have encouraged them to more daring activities, when questioned by the farmers.

In any event, the posture of the government towards addressing this issue is a source of serious worry and perhaps suggests that the government is not interested in the safety of the people of the Southeast, or that the government lacks the will power to decisively address the issue. It could also be interpreted that the government is sympathetic to the herdsmen's cause; whatever it may be; there are, however, many other possible explanations but fundamentally, the major point is that the government has failed in its utmost obligation of ensuring safety for all Nigerians experiencing different levels of violent attacks from Fulani herdsmen especially, in the Southeast. Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that herdsmen attacked Nimbo Uzo-Uwani for one full hour without any form of mobilization of security agencies against them despite the intelligent report about the attack available to the government and its security apparatuses days before the attack? It is now over two years since the attack on Nimbo community. Where are the suspects? Has the arrested suspect been brought to book? What of Attakwu, where are the attackers? Those brandishing guns in Oraukwu, were they authorized to possess weapons? Curiously, the pattern appears to be that each time the Fulani herdsmen are confronted for invading cultivated farm or people's home, with their cattle; they organize and raid the community.

To deepen our findings, the following question was posed to our informants; "How would you assess government's response"? From the responses, there is a general impression that Nigerian government at all levels cannot be trusted. It appears there is a long standing distrust held tenaciously against the government which the government unfortunately, works too hard to validate. This is a government fully aware of the impending attack in Nimbo, it could not stop it. After the attack, it has not been able to address the problem by arresting, arraigning and imprisoning those involved, "how appropriate and suitable is such abdication of primary responsibility"; our Enugu informant 3 queried. There is a common impression among respondents that the ethnic nationality of the President of Nigeria is a major factor inspiring Fulani herdsmen attack and also why security agencies look the other way, while herdsmen commit all sorts of heinous crimes but forcefully descend on peaceful Biafra protesters with excitement and promptness. It is believed therefore that the government has what it takes to deal accordingly and stop the violence but just lack the will to judiciously punish violent herdsmen attacking and killing innocent villagers in the comfort of their ancestral homes. Evidently, "the Fulani herdsmen's body language shows support by powerful Nigerians and in fact the government" because "when they attack, they are not in a haste to leave as people breaking the law or committing serious crime against the state", said Enugu informant 3. This is clear challenge to the state and for it to continue, the state is in support or merely allows it to continue and it is an indictment on the government's legitimacy and acceptance throughout the Southeast region, Anambra informant 1 concludes.

In Attakwu where the herdsmen attacked and killed a seminarian, an attack that later led to the death of a pregnant woman, what has the government done to ensure justice for the families of the deceased? If the government is rightly handling the herdsmen violence, how can herdsmen; private individuals, be issuing threat of violence on other citizens with impunity as was the case in Irete Imo state and other parts of Southeast? Ultimately, what efforts is the government making to permanently address the root cause of herdsmen/farmers conflict in the Southeast? These are questions begging for precise answers. The general impression remains that the government is doing nothing to decisively address herdsmen violence in Southeast.

Conclusion

A pattern of trespass and invasion by herdsmen is increasingly emerging. Beginning with Nimbo, a community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu state in Southeast Nigeria, where scores were attacked and killed, the behaviour of government as a principal instrument has left much to be desired. Despite being in the know of such planned attack, not only could the Nigerian State not prevent the attack, but also over three years down the line, is yet to bring perpetrators to justice. Therefore, the inability of the state to through the law enforcements, contain, resist and punish culprits tends to be energizing Fulani herdsmen attacks in the Southeast.

Nigerian state response to herdsmen violence in the Southeast from our findings is one with no clear positive effect on addressing herdsmen attack in the interest of national unity and peaceful coexistence. We established from our findings that the response is not only weak but suspicious thus reinforcing distrust of Nigerian government, by the Southeast. It was clear from our findings, based on the responses that the government has failed to live up to its responsibility in ensuring the safety of the people of Southeast and protect the attacked villages from the needless carnage by herdsmen. Not only was the government unable to prevent the attack despite the information within their reach on the attack at Nimbo Uzo-Uwani, the government has also failed to bring the culprits who committed the crime to book, more than two years after. It did not end there as the government has also not been able to stop further attack by the herdsmen in the Southeast. Nigerian state response to herdsmen violence in the Southeast from our findings is one with no clear positive effect on addressing herdsmen attack in the interest of national unity and peaceful coexistence. We established from our findings that the response is not only weak but suspicious thus reinforcing distrust of Nigerian government, by the Southeast.

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