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The Past, Present and Future of Kidnapping in Nigeria; a Historical Analysis

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Abstract

Kidnapping is a violent crime which has caused severe security breaches in the human society. It has been in existence since time immemorial. Nobody is spared of being a victim. It has transcended class boundaries. It appears to be a flourishing enterprise undertaken by the criminally minded persons in the country. No region in Nigeria is immune to the crime. Unfortunately, it seems the security agencies in the country are already overwhelmed. This paper attempts to interrogate the phenomenon from a historical perspective. This is done by comparing the occurrences of kidnapping in the pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society. The factors responsible for kidnapping in the epochs were taken into account. Furthermore, consequences of kidnapping were also investigated. The study adopted the social exchange theory as its theoretical base. It is in the opinion of this paper that kidnapping in the past was a precursor to the kidnapping incidences in our contemporary era and will continue to occur in the future owing largely to contradictions in human society. Some of these contradictions include greed, debased values system, traditional practices and other social structural factors in the society. The paper recommended among others that traditional/religious practices which do not uphold the sanctity of human life should be abrogated; value reorientation and strengthening of institutional capacity to control and prevent the crime from taking place.

KEY WORDS: Trans-Saharan slave trade, Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Kidnapping, Ransom Value System

Introduction

Kidnapping as crime has existed from time immemorial. It is a violent crime and can occur anywhere. There is no society which is devoid of crime in the world. However, the frequency and severity of crime differs from place to place and from time to time (Ikezue, 2013). The most harmful crimes are the violent ones. Violent crimes are directly inflicted on the victims. In recent times, there is a proliferation of violent crimes in Nigeria. Prominent among the frequently reported cases of violent crimes in Nigeria is kidnapping (Ikezue, 2013). Though

kidnapping is a violent crime, it is also an organized crime. As an organized crime, kidnapping in some cases entails detailed planning by the perpetrators of the crime with the assistance from collaborators who are often times members of one's family, domestic servants/drivers, neighbours, business associates and even bank officials and law enforcement agents (Ikezue, 2013).

Kidnapping involves unlawfully seizing and carrying away of a person by force or fraud or seizing and detaining of a person against his or her will with intent of carrying that person away later often with demand for a ransom (Garner, 2004). This is just a variant of kidnapping. There are several purposes for kidnapping. Some of which could be for ritual purposes or for settling political scores or familial disputes. According to Ugwuoke (2010), apart from armed robbery, kidnapping is perhaps the next most dreaded and feared violent crime in contemporary Nigeria. However, Ugwuoke (2011) further stressed that it might be difficult for most Nigerians to say which of armed robbery and aggravated kidnapping is the most feared and dreaded crime in the country.

Kidnapping has existed since the existence of man on earth. Kidnapping was even reported in the Old Testament when Lot, Abraham's nephew was kidnapped (Genesis 14 vs12). The first reported case of kidnapping for ransom in the United States of America according to Cyriax, Wilson and Wilson (2005) was the case of the four year old Charles Ross from Philadelphia in the United States on 1st July, 1874". In Nigeria, the crime came to limelight during the agitation for resource control in the Niger Delta region by the Niger Delta militants. According to Ofo (2010), kidnapping in Nigeria attained prominence following the agitation by militants in the Niger-Delta for resource control and provision of necessary infrastructure. In reaction to the perceived government neglect of their agitation, they embarked on the kidnapping of expatriates working for oil companies and other ancillary companies in the region with a view to grounding oil exploration activities and to make the federal government to yield to their demands (Ofo, 2010). As a result, many expatriates were said to have left the region. The seemingly material gains recorded by kidnappers in the region exposed other idle persons to the ease with which people were willing to quietly and secretly pay huge ransoms to secure the release of kidnapped relatives. Thus, kidnapping became a money-making scheme available to a host of teaming unemployed

youths (Ikezue, 2013). Similarly, Ugwuoke (2010) also contended that in Nigeria, the origin of kidnapping for economic gains has been traced to the Niger Delta crises where foreign oil workers were frequently taken hostage only to be released on payment of huge ransoms.

Furthermore, Adedimeji (2009) stressed that words such as kidnapping, abduction or hostage taking were relatively unknown before 2006 in Nigeria. He maintained that Nigerians only read or heard of such words in stories as reported in local and foreign newspapers. According to him, all that changed when on February 18, 2006, the first case of hostage taking was reported in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Since then, kidnapping continued to take place even outside the place where it recently started. Adedimeji (2009) stated that the excuse given by the kidnappers when they struck was that they employed the method to seek for change as well as a bargaining tool to draw national and global attention to their crusade of fighting for resource control and increased revenue derivation to oil-producing states and communities in the Niger Delta areas.

When kidnapping started in the Niger Delta region, the targets of the kidnappers then were mainly expatriate oil workers. According to Ofo (2010), following the exit of expatriate oil workers from the Niger Delta, children and parents of prominent individuals in the oil-producing areas, especially Rivers and Bayelsa States, became new targets. He stressed that at this point, kidnapping assumed a gravely dangerous dimension for two reasons. First, it became commercialized: it has transformed to a money-making enterprise instead of a tool for popular agitation. Secondly, its practice has spread to other parts of the country. He further said that today everybody can be a victim, as virtually no one is beyond being kidnapped. Kidnapping therefore has grown unfortunately to become a booming business over which the authorities seem helpless and hopeless in curbing it. According to Ofo (2010) the list of victims of kidnapping so far is an amazing broad range; it includes males and females, the young and the not so young, the prominent and the not so prominent, the wealthy and the not so wealthy, the religious and the not so religious, the ruling class and the ruled.

Contrary to the views held by Adedimeji (2009), Ofo (2010) and Ugwuoke (2010), kidnapping is not entirely a new phenomenon in Nigeria. It existed even in the pre-colonial era. This view is consistent with Perry (2009) who maintained that kidnapping undoubtedly

had existed as a phenomenon in Africa since antiquity. He further contended that kidnapping intensified and grew seemingly unrestrained during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before the various European governments colonized most of the continent's regions and harnessed the rampage for their own purposes (Perry, 2009). This agrees with Anazonwu and Obiajulu (2001:4) who contended that:

> Prior to and in the early days of British colonial rule, the Aros featured prominently in such cultural practices like human sacrifice and slave trade practiced in Igbo land. They were so politically immune in this regard that if an Aro person residing in a town or district wants some money, he would walk into a bush and wait for children either playing or farming and collect one or two of them to be sold in Uzoakoli market. Such a person could neither be apprehended nor prosecuted because people were afraid of the long juju of Arochukwu.

The above excerpts point to the existence of the kidnapping for slavery and other purposes in Igbo land in the pre and early colonial periods. This paper is therefore focused on interrogating the existence of kidnapping in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era with a view to unravelling the motives behind its existence, the forms it assumes, its consequences and remedial actions to stem it.

Theoretical Anchorage

The Social Exchange Theory

This is a social psychological and sociological perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties. The proponents of the theory are George Homans (1910 - 1989), Peter Blau (1918-2002) and Richard Emerson (1925-1982). Each of these scholars propounded a version of the social exchange theory. Central to their views is that social behaviour is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige. Persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them. This process of influence tends to work out at equilibrium to a balance in the exchanges.

Social Exchange theory posits that all human relationships are formed using a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. The theory has its roots in

economics, psychology and sociology. It features many of the main assumptions found in Rational Choice Theory and Structuralism. The social exchange perspective argues that people calculate the overall worth of a particular relationship by subtracting its cost from the rewards it provides (Worth= Rewards-Costs). The worth of relationship influences its outcome, or whether people will continue with a relationship or terminate it. Positive relationships are expected to endure, whereas negative relationships will probably terminate.

Social Exchange Theory argues that the major force in interpersonal relationships is the satisfaction of both people's self-interest. Self-interest is not considered necessarily bad and can be used to enhance relationships. Interpersonal exchanges are thought to be analogous to economic exchanges where people are satisfied when they receive a fair return for their expenditures. According to Tzanelli (2006), exchange transforms into a social act regulated by rules and obligations, often present exclusively on the part of the 'giver' (the victim's family, business, or the host country in which the kidnapping takes place). Bourdieu (1998) argues that to hold cultural capital ('taste, education) grants one with the power equivalent to that of someone who possesses economic capital. It implies in principle that one can convert (but never reduce) cultural into economic capital. Kidnapping according to Tzanelli involves a process of converting one thing (the victim) into another (money). He argues that human life is the stable denominator in kidnapping calculations. The kidnappers threatened to take lives and the negotiating authorities, or the family of the hostages is trying to save them.

Miller (2005) outlines several major objections to or problems with the social exchange theory as developed from early seminal works. The theory reduces human interaction to a purely rational process that arises from economic theory. The theory favours openness as it was developed in the 1970s when ideas of freedom and openness were preferred, but there may be times when openness is not the best option in a relationship. The theory assumes that the ultimate goal of a relationship is intimacy when this might not always be the case. The theory places relationships in a linear structure, when some relationships might skip steps or go backwards in terms of intimacy. It is strongly seated in an individualist mindset, which may limit its application and description of collectivist cultures. This notwithstanding however, the social exchange theory sees kidnapping as involving negotiation and exchange.

Here the human person is exchanged for inanimate things like money, political concessions and even cultural demands. This theory is relevant because it is concerned with social exchange which is the key element of kidnapping.

Review of Related Literature

Kidnapping in the Pre-colonial Era

Continental Africa's indigenous inhabitants (members of various ethnic, religious and cultural communities) aided and abetted the European slave traders during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era (1440-1886) (Perry, 2009). They committed innumerable acts of kidnapping on their neighbours with whom they co-habited the sub-Saharan regions of the African continent. Many of the abducted unfortunates, besides being incorporated into the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, were sold into other slavery systems as well, i.e., the Trans-Saharan, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the ubiquitous internal networks for which there is a dearth of verifiable documentation translated into English (Perry, 2009).

According to Thompson (1987), the Europeans kidnapped Africans and enslaved them during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era. However, he argued that the management and conduct of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade on the African side was not solely the province of great polities, monarchies, and nobilities, as suggested by Thornton; nor was the kidnapping of Africans confined to the Europeans in concert with African "rogue ne'er-do-wells," as implied by Bailey, but was a lucrative enterprise in which Africans, irrespective of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, economic, or social considerations, participated in their fellow humans' exploitation. Thompson (1987) stressed that the wealth-generating opportunities provided avenues to self-aggrandizement, perhaps the overarching reason for committing such abductions.

Perry (2009) maintained that of the various ways used to ensnare humans for sale during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era, kidnapping was extensive. Similarly, Lovejoy (1983) opined that slavery was virtually always initiated through violence that reduced the status of a person from a condition of freedom and citizenship to a condition of slavery. The most common type of violence has been warfare in which prisoners were enslaved. Lovejoy (1983) added that variations in the organization of such violence include raids whose purpose was to acquire slaves, banditry and kidnapping and concluded that warfare, slave-

raiding, and kidnapping have accounted for most new slaves in history. This explains why Patterson (1982) averred that violent action that generates prisoners, separating them by force, and selling them into bondage qualifies as kidnapping in a broader sense. Slavery was pervasive in Africa long before Arab and European traders arrived. Africans enslaved their fellow Africans throughout the continent (Watkins, 2001). For instance, in Ghana, one third of the population was enslaved between 1076 and 1600 (Watkins, 2001). Perry (2009) adumbrated that secluded, sparsely populated rural areas were the most likely regions in which kidnappers lurked. The pervasiveness of kidnapping was very widespread in the area inhabited by the people of Igbo tribe as according to Samuel Crowther (1864) cited in Isichei (1978). He said:

> While detained here [Idda] I gleaned some information about the countries on the back of Idda. One might travel from Idda to Onitsha by land through the Igara country, if it had not been rendered unsafe by a tribe of the lbo, called Igbo, who are hostile to travellers by plundering their loads, kidnapping their persons; and selling them away into slavery; and if there happens to be a horse among the passengers it is killed, and eaten up. Through this tribe Igbo, European goods find their way by land to Idda, such as gunpowder, brass rods, and other trade goods. (Isichei 1978, 20)

Perry (2009) further stated that during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era, day-to-day human activities such as crop cultivation, animal herding, hunting, and gathering, to name a few, were rather precarious undertakings in some areas of sub-Saharan Africa, for most people had to be constantly aware that human predators roamed the countryside at will in search of victims.

The Igbo society had a fair share of its participation in kidnapping and slave trade just as other ethnic groups within and outside Nigeria. According to Isichei (1978), Okwunanne Udeogu and Isuofia were among the people remembered for their active participation in the trade.   Okwunanne was a native of Alor. Isuofia came from Arochukwu. From very early times slavery had been practised in Alor. According to Isichei, Okwunanne Udeogu took the collection and sale of slaves as his profession. People who collected and sold slaves became richer and richer. Okwunanne formed a gang not only to buy slaves but also to raid for slaves (Isichei, 1978). He also had contacts with other slave dealers in the neighbouring villages. By this means the volume of trade in slaves increased and one Isuofia from

Arcochukwu came to settle at Alor for the sole purpose of dealing in slaves (Isichei, 1978). Okwunanne became the best-known slave dealer in the whole area. People from the nearby villages could come to sell their slaves secretly in either Okwunanne's or Isuofia's place. It was Isuofia's duty to arrange for the transportation of slaves from Alor to Arochukwu. Isuofia did not himself engage in slave raiding. He only bought slaves from those who willingly brought them to him (Isichei 1978). People even sold their children via an arrangement known as consensual kidnapping. Parents even sold their children, for want of food; these children were not told that they had been sold (Isichei, 1978). Their parents would ask them to help their family friends convey their goods to market. These children were pampered until they got to market where they would be sold. When they arrived with these children in the market, they (children) were asked to look after a few worthless commodities. Then the slave dealers, mostly Aro people, would pretend that they were pricing those goods, when they were really surveying the children. They then came back to the sellers and a price was fixed (some items of European goods). When the sellers had received these goods they disappeared, and that was the last the children would be seen (Isichei, 1978).

In traditional Igbo society and other places both within and outside Nigeria, individuals were usually kidnapped for ritual or social reasons (Ugwuoke, 2010). Kidnapping then was mainly for the purposes of sacrifice either to appease the gods or for the burial of a prominent chief or warrior. Kidnapping for ritual practice is still in existence in Igbo land and among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Ugwuoke (2010) stressed that existence of kidnapping for ritual purposes could be for making 'charms' believed to assist one spiritually to gain advantage in politics, commerce, academics and other spheres of life. An incident of ritual kidnapping was vividly captured by Smith (2001) when he described the Otokoto saga in Owerri where human beings were slaughtered for ritual purposes. It could be argued however that kidnapping for ritual purposes was a precursor to the ravaging spate of kidnapping for economic reason which has assumed an alarming dimension in the contemporary Nigerian society (Ikezue, 2013).

Kidnapping in the contemporary era

Kidnapping for ransom is now a flourishing business venture for criminal elements in the society. In recent time, the country has witnessed kidnapping of persons in large scale. The

first of its kind was kidnapping of the over 276 Chibok girls in April 2014 from government girls secondary school located in a town called Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria by the Boko Baram terrorist group. Several other large-scale kidnappings have taken place since then. There was the kidnapping of 110 Dapchi girls in March 2018 by the same terrorist group. Subsequently, criminal elements like the bandits, killer herdsmen and the unknown gunmen started kidnapping people randomly with a view to collecting ransoms from the victims or their family members. The interesting aspect of the present-day kidnapping is that slave trade is no longer in existence; the victims cannot be sold in a slave market as was the case in the pre-colonial era. Kidnapped persons were requested to pay ransom for their release. For instance, when the Kaduna bound train was attacked on 28th March 2022; some of the passengers were killed and some other taken away as captives, the kidnappers used that as a bargaining tool to free some of their members detained in several correctional facilities in the country. The captives were forced to pay very huge ransom for their safety. It could be argued that the bulk of kidnapping in the present era is for ransom. However, there are also situations where people were kidnapped for ritual purposes in the contemporary time or even for some other personal reasons.

Kidnapping may sometimes be politically motivated. For instance, in the year 2003, a former governor of Anambra state was kidnapped and whisked away from his office by a detachment of the Nigeria police led by an Assistant Inspector General of police in charge of the zone. The exercise was foiled owing to the timely intervention of the then vice president of Nigeria. This is a typical case of politically motivated kidnapping. Other cases of politically influenced kidnapping abound in our contemporary times. For instance, the kidnapping of the father of a onetime People's Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial candidate in the Anambra 2010 governorship election is a case that readily comes to mind. It has to be stated however that politically motivated kidnapping is not as rampant as the economically motivated ones. The most rampant form of kidnapping in Nigeria is ransom/economic kidnapping (Ugwuoke, 2010). This is kidnapping for economic/material gains. Other forms of kidnappings also existed such as kidnapping for vendetta, child abduction, ritual kidnapping, kidnapping based on emotional disruption etc. These are not as rampant as the economically motivated kidnapping which has become almost a daily affair.

Factors responsible for Kidnapping

People kidnap others for several reasons. For instance, Ugwuoke, (2010:196-197) stated that "the motives for kidnapping are varied but essentially they can be subsumed under economic, political and social/religious reasons." He contended that most often however, these motives may overlap as kidnapping for ritual purposes may also have some social, monetary or economic objectives. In traditional Igbo societies, individuals were mostly kidnapped for ritual or social reasons. Kidnapping was mainly for the purposes of sacrifice either to appease the gods or for the burial of a prominent chief or warrior. It appears that the motive for kidnapping in the pre-colonial era and now remain the same. At the root of most kidnapping in the different epochs is the quest for materialistic acquisition. The recurring decimals in both epochs are greed and the desire to live affluent lifestyle. Kidnapping for ritual may not necessarily be for money making, it could be for burial of prominent members of the society such the traditional rulers and title holders. Ugwuoke (2010) argued that kidnapping for economic reasons is alien to most traditional cultures in Nigeria. This is not a factual statement because people were kidnapped in the past and sold into slavery with a view to making pecuniary gains. For instance, Anazonwu and Obiajulu (2001) stressed that prior to and in the early days of British colonial rule, the Aros featured prominently in such cultural practices like human sacrifice and slave trade practiced in Igbo land. They were known for kidnapping and selling of children in Uzoakoli market. This is consistent with Isichei (1978) who argued that People who collected and sold slaves became richer and richer. She stressed that Okwunanne formed a gang not only to buy slaves but also to raid (kidnap) for slaves (Isichei, 1978). This was corroborated also by Perry (2009) that of the various ways used to ensnare humans for sale during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era, kidnapping was extensive.

The value system of Nigerians and especially the Igbos is believed to have changed tremendously over the years. It is believed that this change in our value system is to some extent responsible for the increase in unbridled penchant for materialism. Umez (2000:53) maintained that "the dominant value system in contemporary Nigeria is one that glorifies and endorses corrupt and illegal means as necessary, normal and sufficient means to ends". He also maintained that "this new value system which now shapes the moral rectitude of most Nigerians including the youths is a complete reverse of the traditional system which was essentially predicated on hard work and good morals. This is consistent with Ugwuoke

(2005:65) where he stated that "Nigeria possesses a materialistic culture". He maintained that 'the overriding goal in Nigeria is the acquisition of wealth, that the 'almighty naira' is something for which most Nigerians are taught to strive and cherish'. The value system in the contemporary Nigerian society therefore underscores the insatiable desire to acquire and own wealth by all means. This is consistent with Ikpang (2009) who argued that the worship for money is a facilitating factor for the crime of kidnapping in Nigeria. Consequent upon this, Ugwuoke (2011) concluded that a number of factors were responsible for this change in our value system. According to him, these factors include; "the influence of colonialism, the impacts of the Nigerian civil war, the influence of long military dictatorship and the influence of the media have all contributed to this changing trend which has worsened the security situation in Nigeria" (Ugwuoke, 2011:49).

Similarly, Anazonwu and Obiajulu (2001) contended that Igbo political values at the moment revolve around pursuit of naked selfish interest, not only by many Igbo elites but also by many custodians of Igbo culture. They argued that conflict of values characterizes contemporary Igbo political participation in Nigeria. According to them,

> "as a victim of incomplete state conquest by forces of colonialism in Nigeria, many primordial socio cultural values of the Igbos still persist and in fact do exist with civic-cultural values of the country which have to do with democratic ethos viz: tolerance, altruism, co-operation, etc" (Anazonwu and Obiajulu, 2001:6).

They therefore concluded that human life seems to be losing its cherished values among the Igbos as awful stories of violent crimes, decomposing corpses on the highways, cannibalism; ritual killings, communal in fighting, jungle justice reign in many urban areas. It can therefore be stated that the bastardization of the Igbo man's cultural values may have precipitated the increase in crime rate in the region especially in the recent incidences of kidnapping.

Technological advances seem to aid kidnapping in Nigeria. Ikpang (2009) noted that the Global System of Mobile (GSM) Communication provides the mechanism through which kidnappers use in communicating and negotiating with relations of the kidnapped victims in order to arrive at an agreed amount to be paid as ransom. This agreed with Uwaya (2011) who averred that the revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has continued to propel organized crimes, armed banditry and sectarian violence, all of which pose grave threats to national security. According to him, distance is no longer a barrier as

criminals and subversives based at different and far-flung geographical locations can now network, plan, coordinate and execute attacks by phone or the internet beyond the reach of law enforcement agents. Furthermore, Uwaya (2011) lamented that the internet has become an open source for know-how on any subject, crime and criminality inclusive. Not only that know-how about weapons of mass destruction can now be readily sourced from the Internet, bombs can now be remotely detonated with cell phones. Interestingly, the recent wave of kidnapping in Nigeria is actually being aided by the advancements made in the ICT sector in the country. This is principally visible in the proliferation of mobile phones which has made phone calls easy. Kidnappers most often use mobile phones to alert family members of their victims of the development and eventually institute mechanism for negotiation. Ransoms are mostly negotiated through the use of mobile phones. It is important to note therefore that ICT especially mobile telephones play very vital roles in kidnapping in Nigeria.

The police in some cases were found to aid and abet kidnapping in the course of performing their legitimate duties. For instance, Ugwulebo (2011:74) opined that "the police force has been polluted by bad eggs". He however advised that flushing out the bad eggs without dealing with the bad hen will amount to nothing. He believes that the bad hen will always lay bad eggs to replace the ones which were removed. According to him, "the bad hens are the powerful and well-connected individuals in the society who are posing threats to the system. He also contended that when the police are on the check points kidnappers do not operate. When the police are leaving their check points, they fire shots into the air signalling to the kidnappers that they have finished and are about to leave the check points. He maintained that the police are not always on the road when kidnappers operate. Similarly, Olebara (2010:10) stressed that "the irony is that the chances of apprehending kidnappers by law enforcement agents are very remote". She cited the case of an Enugu based Divisional Police Officer (DPO) said to be aiding and abetting kidnapping as a ready example. Olebara (2010) insisted that security agencies in Nigeria are not doing enough in this regard because one wonders how those who were kidnapped were smuggled away, passing through the numerous check points. She continued that the problem lies in the fact that some of the law enforcement agents at check points are only interested in collecting bribes which results in lack of concentration when they are on duty. Even when a case of kidnapping is reported to

the police, they most often fail to apprehend the suspects. Ugwuoke (2011) stressed that it has become obvious that kidnappers in some occasions network with corrupt members of the Nigerian police. He cited a case of a Port Harcourt based businessman who reported the kidnap of his father at a police station in Imo state. Just barely 15 minutes after, the kidnappers called him on phone and told him the content of his statement. This complicity endangers the lives of people who go to the police for protection. Furthermore, Ugwulebo (2011) stressed that a former Inspector General of Police often accused his men of complicity in crimes especially kidnapping, assassination and corruption. He posited that there is a dialectical relationship between police connivance and increases in criminal activities in Nigeria including kidnapping. Some members of neighbourhood watch security organizations are not spared of the rot in aiding and abetting kidnapping. There were serious allegations levied against them in some communities for even participating in the crime of kidnapping. He continued that in certain areas of the country especially Aba, people can be kidnapped for ransom as low as recharge cards for mobile phones.

Nobody is above or below kidnapping. Victims of kidnapping in some cases play vital roles in the kidnapping process. When an affluent individual flaunts his/her wealth openly in the presence of hungry individuals who are looking for ways of making ends meet, that persons is really drawing attention to his/herself. The role of the victims of kidnapping may include their carelessness in releasing vital information about themselves to members of their families, friends or neighbours. At times it may be due to living careless and loose life. When one stays out at night regularly at odd places, that individual may be exposing his/herself to danger of being kidnapped.

Public reactions to kidnapping in Nigeria vary. The fear of being kidnapped forced some members of the public to avoid night outings. People who have flashy cars stopped using them at odd hours. Some of the positive reactions of the public to kidnapping include living prudently, assisting the police and members of the vigilante groups with the necessary information on how to apprehend suspected kidnappers in their communities and even outright extra judicial killing of kidnappers in their localities. The negative reactions of the public to kidnapping are many. Ikpang (2009) stated that the growing fear of insecurity in Nigeria is a fall out of the crime of kidnapping. He further stressed that kidnapping has castrated social life with the people living in perpetual fear of what will happen next.

According to him, the social lives of the people has dramatically changed because many people who consider themselves as potential victims now shun social outings and curtail their visit to or patronage of relaxation centres. The level of social interaction between the people has deteriorated.

People who were at scenes of kidnapping often decline to give witness in court when called upon to do so. This is due mainly to insecurity of their lives and that of their relations. According to a former Governor of Imo state, some of the kidnappers who were arrested by the security agencies and charged to competent courts of law were being discharged by the courts because the prosecutor could not provide witnesses to try the kidnappers (Nwachukwu, 2012). The governor pointed out that the prosecutors were finding it extremely difficult to provide witnesses because the witnesses were afraid of coming to court to give evidence against suspected kidnappers. The governor revealed that there was a man who testified against kidnappers in court early in the year 2012, but was shot dead after one week (Nwachukwu, 2012). Due to the unwillingness of people to voluntarily testify to kidnap cases in the law courts, judges were in most occasions forced to discharge and acquit the suspects for lack of evidence.

Most kidnapped people pay the agreed ransoms to their kidnappers. It was alleged that some state governments even pay the negotiated ransoms to kidnappers in order to secure the release of their loved ones and friends. They failed to rely on the police because it will be a futile effort with dire consequences. For instance, it was alleged that an undisclosed amount of money was paid by the Anambra state government for the release of a prominent movie star when he was kidnapped. This goes to show that the members of the public do not have enough confidence on the police when their relations are kidnapped.

Recently, the unknown gunmen have taken to kidnapping as a source of money for carrying out their nefarious activities. Kidnapped victims were often taken to their hideout in the forest. Some of the members of the sect started as separatist fighters who were fighting for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra. It did not take long before they resorted to criminality in the name of separatist agitation. According to Professor Soludo, the governor of Anambra state, there is nothing separatist in the agitation rather, it was purely a criminal enterprise carried out by criminally minded individuals whose sole purpose was to make money through criminal means (Ikezue, 2013).

Kidnapping beyond the contemporary era

Crime according to Durkheim (1938) is not only inevitable, it can also be functional. He argued that it becomes dysfunctional when its rate is unusually high or low. In the same vein, kidnapping being a violent crime may persist in the human society. The way and manner the human society is organized will most likely trigger deviance especially among the marginal strata of the society. In Nigeria, poverty and unemployment were seen as the principal factors influencing crime commission. Poverty and employment were responsible for terrorism in the northeast of Nigeria, banditry in the northwest, unknown gunmen in the southeast to killer herdsmen in the north central region of Nigeria. Whenever there is an army of unemployed and poverty-stricken persons in a country and nothing seriously is done to improve their situations, it takes only some time for full manifestation of their frustration on the society. An army of unemployed and poverty ridden youth is a catalyst for various crimes including kidnapping. If concerted efforts are not made to contain the twin problems of unemployment and poverty in the country, then kidnapping and other forms of criminality may persist. Other factors such as willingness to commit crime, educational and family background; greed, peer group influence, environmental factors and cultural/religious beliefs also influence kidnapping in particular and other crimes in general. It could be stated; however, that the future of kidnapping in Nigeria is almost certain if nothing is done to reduce the rate of poverty, unemployment and other intervening variables in the country.

Consequences of Kidnapping

There are conflicting statistics on kidnapping in Nigeria. Ofo (2010) argued that official police records are not very helpful in this regard because there are numerous incidents of kidnapping that are not reported to the police. He gave three reasons why it is so. First, is the fact that the law enforcement agents appear to be helpless in tackling this phenomenon on account of poor funding, drab motivation of personnel and inadequate equipment and technology. Telecommunication companies in Nigeria seem not to assist when their assistance is needed. Secondly, according to (Ofo, 2010), relatives of kidnapped victims were often frightened by the kidnappers who warn them of grave consequences should the matter be reported to the police. Thirdly and finally, there are reports of information given to the police being leaked to the detriment of the informants (Ofo, 2010).

There are several difficulties that impinge on the collection of reliable statistics on criminal activity and victimization (Alemika, 2004). Some of the most important difficulties are associated with the collection of crime and victimization information (Alemika and Nnorom, 2006). They argued that,

> The following are the major difficulties: - Some crimes occur without anyone realizing it; many victims of crimes do not report them to formal law enforcement officials such as the police and security formations to enable them to record such events; Law enforcement agents may resolve some crimes brought to their notice without recording them and invoking the criminal process. These are often acknowledged as the problems of 'dark' and 'grey' crime figures, which imply 'unknown or undetected or unreported crime' and 'detected, reported but not recorded' incidents of crimes and victimizations. These problems indicate that the crime statistics produced by the criminal justice agencies – police, courts, prosecutors and prisons – are not true or accurate reflection of the extent and pattern of criminal activities and victimization in society (Alemika and Nnorom, 2006:9-10).

Despite the difficulties inherent in gathering reliable statistics on kidnapping, its prevalence in Nigeria is incontrovertible. Nwadiaro and Nkwocha (2011:1) stressed that kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria is "one assuming the posture of a pandemic trying to engulf the entire geographical terrain". Similarly, Ofo (2010) contends that the rampancy of kidnapping incidents in the country fuelled by the apparent incapacity of government in curtailing the situation has had a grave negative influence on the nation. In the first place, it has negatively affected foreign investment inflows into the country. He further stressed that there are reported cases of multinational companies which have shut down their business operations in the country and have re-located to neighbouring countries with more clement socio-political business environment. This has also occasioned the migration of foreign employees out of the country. The negative impact of this on the economy is huge, because it can hamper developmental plans of the country (Ofo, 2010).

Kidnapping has occasioned needless loss of lives. Some of the deaths were directly linked to the kidnapping incidents while some others were the result of governmental response to it (Ofo, 2010). For example, in the Niger-Delta region, government authorities responded to kidnappings by deploying the Joint Task Force (JTF), which used excessive force and engaged militants and criminals in gun battles. Such battles resulted in deaths and injuries,

widespread civilian displacement, destruction of communities and property and decreased security all of which have very serious economic undertones. He also contended that quite unfortunately, the rampancy of kidnapping has had a telling effect on the social life of the people. In his views, there is general suspicion among the populace, especially in view of reports that in some kidnapping cases neighbours and relatives have been fingered as being part of the plots. It is not difficult to imagine the feeling of despair and hopelessness the situation has visited on the citizens. Without doubt, it has occasioned mental agony on the populace (Ofo, 2010).

Furthermore, Nwadiaro and Nkwocha (2011) observed the effects of kidnapping to include decimation of human lives, extortion of money; liquidation of business and refusal of people to locate industry in areas prone to kidnapping. This led Ikpang (2009) to argue that various governments of the region appear to be incapable of suppressing or eradicating the crime. He maintained that people have lost confidence in the ability of the governments to eradicate the crime and the integrity of the entrenched governments has waned before the people as a result. The social lives of the people have dramatically changed because many people who consider themselves as potential victims now shun social outings and curtail their visit to or patronage of relaxation centres. The level of social interaction between the people has deteriorated (Ikpang, 2009). Socio economic consequences of kidnapping in Nigeria abound. The most outrageous impact of kidnapping is the continuous loss of lives and property. Killing of kidnapped victims by kidnappers in most cases resulted in anguish and agony to the relatives of the deceased person(s). Killing of such people sometimes precipitated the decline and eventual collapse of many lucrative businesses with several unpleasant consequences. Kidnappers extort money from their victims. Kidnappers torture their victims to extort money from them or their relatives. Torture according to Nwadiaro and Nkwocha (2011) makes victims of kidnapping to accede to the demands of the kidnappers within the shortest possible time. Female captives were often times gang raped by their abductors. Rape is the worst treatments to be meted to a woman. It debases her personality and subjects her to unwarranted publicity. Fear has also made several people to relocate to relatively 'safer areas when Aba became a no-go area because of the ubiquity of kidnapping, many people ran to Owerri, Port Harcourt, Umuahia and other adjoining cities

for safety (Ugwulebo, 2011). Some of the economic consequences of kidnapping include dearth of night life and relocation of already established businesses and people (Ugwulebo, 2011).

Gamble (2011) stressed that kidnapping is one of the most psychologically damaging crimes of all time. She believes that victims typically take many years to heal from the psychological wounds inflicted upon them and some never completely recover. She added that kidnapping cause deep emotional and mental scars that makes victims to battle with issues of trust, independence, love, sex, respect, and a litany of others. Psychologically, the thought about kidnapping is very frightening, the experience of the crime is traumatic to the victims and their relatives and its effects generally on the psyche of the people and the serious challenge it poses to various levels of government is enormous (Ikpang, 2009). The crime of kidnapping creates fear of insecurity on both the victims, relations of the victims and the general public. It also leads to untimely death, loss of monies; it limits one's freedom for movement and even imposes serious impediments to businesses in the country especially in terms of foreign direct investments.

Similarly, Ugwuoke (2011: 44-45) stated that "the most frightening and worrisome aspect of this deadly crime in Nigeria is not just the torture and humiliation that victims pass through at the hands of these criminals and the monetary extortion in the name of ransom that usually follow, but the evidently helpless response of security agencies to curbing the menace". Governments' responses on the menace of kidnapping have not been adequate. The deployment of joint military task force to quell the problem in some states may not be adjudged to be effective because innocent people were often killed or maimed in the crossfire between government forces and the kidnappers. It appears the different levels of governments have not sufficiently applied technological knowhow to stem kidnapping in the country.

The law enforcement agents especially the police have not helped matters. There are several occasions where the policemen were involved in kidnapping unsuspecting innocent citizens. Some of them abet kidnapping directly or indirectly by their actions and inactions. Even the criminal justice system appears not to be doing enough to checkmate the excesses of these miscreants. This is usually the case when suspected kidnappers were discharged and acquitted in the courts for lack of evidence. Members of the public more often than not

refuse to testify in courts when called upon because of fear of being maimed or killed by the criminals. This scenario has therefore made prosecution and eventual conviction of suspected kidnappers almost an unattainable feat.

Conclusion

Kidnapping was the major means of acquiring slaves during the Trans-Atlantic-Slave Trade era. The principal motivation for kidnapping then was to make economic gains. Several centuries after, the crime has continued. Kidnappers in the contemporary era have device several sophisticated means of kidnapping their victims. People were kidnapped in the past for ritual and social purposes. This has not ceased even with the advancement in technology and improved security networks in the contemporary world. It is unfortunate that people still indulge in ritual kidnapping in this twenty-first century. Most of the people kidnapped for ritual purposes were mostly used for perceived money-making voodoo or for seeking of preternatural powers. This could explain why some people will easily get involved in money making rituals with the sole aim of becoming rich. The painful aspect of this reality is that some criminally minded law enforcement agents were allegedly accused of being part of the human organ harvesting syndicates. This act is barbaric and must be condemned and punished in accordance with the dictates of the law. It is therefore very pertinent that concerted efforts are made to stop this inhuman conduct in our contemporary society.

Recommendations

Kidnapping has caused needless loss of lives and properties; this paper therefore recommended that members of the society should report to the appropriate authorities any act that threatens the peace of their society. People should not be complicit in the crime and should do all that they can to forestall any breakdown of law and order. People should learn to be contented with whatever they have. It is the desire to get rich quick and unwillingness to pursue live decently that is partly responsible for involvement in crimes including kidnapping. There is need for attitudinal change. This could be through value reorientation. The values of honesty, being industrious, and God fearing should be imbibed by all. Strengthening of institutional capacity is inevitable. The judiciary should be truly independent, firm and take decisions without fear or favour. The law enforcement agencies in the country should lead by example. It is inconceivable and unconscionable for law enforcement agents to engage in corrupt practices. The anti-graft agencies should lead by

example and deal decisively with anybody found to be corrupt or aiding or abetting corruption. If kidnappers could be prosecuted and convicted, the society will be a safer place for all to live in.

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