

## **Formation of Non-state Groups in Northwestern Nigeria: the Ethnicization and Politicization of Vigilantism, 2010–2020**

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### **Abstract**

*This article examined the formation of non-state groups in northwestern region of Nigeria, which has been enmeshed with the banditry crisis. The emergence of two dominant vigilante groups along ethnic lines have raised serious concerns amidst claims of complicity among observers and stakeholders. The yansakai and the Fulani militia are both perceived to represent ethnic interests. The research dissects how ethnicity and politics are intertwined in the formation and activities of these non-state armed groups. The research scope is from 2010 to 2020, a period that witnessed the rise, growth and unprecedented escalation of violence in the northwestern region of the country. The research uses both primary and secondary sources, comprising published books, journals and news materials. Extrapolating from the historical antecedence of the Hausa and Fulani from the jihad of 1804, the research argued that the emergence of both groups is deeply connected with conflicting political relations in their histories which only resurfaced as agro-pastoral clashes.*

*Keywords: ethnicity, ethnicization, banditry, Fulani militia, yansakai*

### **Introduction**

Ethnicity and vigilantism are two relative terms that are difficult to extricate when discussing vigilantes within the African context. This is because many self-help groups and vigilantes emerged as community initiatives

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aimed at tackling insecurity and other forms of physical threats where government's security agencies are not adequate in terms of number or weapons, to provide the security needed to protect the citizens (Kanton and Persson, 2010, pp.5 & 11). These non-state actors became expedient to complement the state security apparatus. Again, in most African settings, communities were established along ethnic and cultural affiliations especially in the rural areas where the groups, by reason of ancestral origin, clustered together in several hamlets and villages. Even the cities sometimes were no exception, as it is common especially in some Nigerian cities to find sections of a city that are predominantly occupied or dominated by members of the same ethnic group. Colonial policies in emerging cosmopolitan urban areas, had encouraged settlements in the urban areas along ethnic lines, and had since become a common feature in some Nigerian cities (See Lugard, 1911; Lugard, 1929). For instance, southerners are known to occupy settlements or "strangers" quarters known as *sabon gari* in the northern part of the country, and in the southern part of the country northerners also lived in separate quarters known as *sabo*, *abakpa*, *gbogobiri*, etc (Nnoli, 1978; Mangut & Wuam, 2011, Chapters 18 – 20).

African experience from the past indicated that vigilantes formed along ethnic lines had been a constant feature in many post-independence African states that once grappled with internal crisis and wars. It is easy to see minor skirmishes, given ethnic interpretation and eventually metamorphosing to major crisis. A report on peoples' perceptions and priorities on safety, security and informal policing in some focal states conducted in Nigeria in 2003, identified "ethnic vigilantism" among the four typologies of vigilantes patronized by Nigerians (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004, p.12). Such groups were considered as being organized along ethnic or tribal lines to defend narrow interests and sometimes carry out crime control functions. Baker described such groups as "ethnic or clan militias: who are acting to protect a whole cultural web that makes a clan or whole ethnic group distinct" (Baker, 2010).

Most of these ethnic-based vigilante groups can easily be

identified by their composition, and often times their target are members of another ethnic group or the government if they perceived that some policies of the government was unfavourable to their group or survival as a nation (Barje, 2021, p.129). In Nigeria, the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) founded in 1994 started as an armed wing of a pro-democracy movement whose objectives were clearly spelt out along ethnic lines (Harnischefeger, 2008, p.6). However, when the group split in 1999, one faction embarked on vigilante services and their activities went beyond crime fighting as they became known for carrying out vigilante services, providing security in several towns and city by checking the activities of criminals and cultists (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004).

The International Crisis Group (ICG) report on Africa noted that where vigilantes were mobilized in response to an uprising, they eventually “end up as powerful ethnic militias or outright insurgents” who “can undermine local authorities, widen conflict by targeting ethnic or political rivals or threaten longer-term stability by continuing as an autonomous armed force” (International Crisis Group, 2017). In Sierra Leone during the civil wars of the 1990s, Civil Defence Forces that emerged to fight alongside government forces were ethnically distinct (tribal militias) operating largely independent of each other. The Kamajors from Mendeland considered as the numerically dominant were known for being brutal especially when operating outside their ethnic domain (International Crisis Group, 2017, pp.4-5).

### **Rationale and Delineation**

Nigeria's northwest is one of the country's six geopolitical zones and it consist of seven states, namely: Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna States. The states that are least affected by banditry are Kano and Jigawa where the activities of bandits have been curtailed appreciably, except few instances of banditry operations in Falgore forest in Kano. Kaduna state is excluded in this research because of the religious interpretation that is usually associated with the conflict in the state, where the crisis is often seen from the perspective of Hausa/

Fulani and religious groups which provoke violent conflicts mostly in the Southern part of the state. The focus is on Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto States where the most dominant groups are the Hausa and the Fulani, and predominantly Moslems.

Activities of armed bandits and vigilantes in the last ten years had thrown northwestern Nigeria into a calamitous stage. More worrisome is the renewed influence of jihadist groups and a spike in their activities in the northwest. There are fears that the region could soon become a link connecting Islamic insurgencies in the central Sahel with decade-old Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. Security sources pointed the resurgence of the long-dormant Boko Haram splinter group, Jama'atu Ansarul Musulmina Fi Biladis Sudan (Group of Partisans for Muslims in Black Africa), better known as Ansaru, which was active in northwestern Nigeria between 2011 and 2014 (International Crisis Group, 2020, p.i). "A poorly secured international boundary, meanwhile enables the influx of arms and facilitates the movement of jihadists to and from the Sahel where the Islamic State has been expanding its influence" (Barje, 2022, 563; International Crisis Group, 2020, p.19).

Farmers and herders" clashes which had been an ordinary feature over the last fifty years, suddenly degenerated into violent clashes culminating into the emergence of armed bandits who continued to wreak havoc over the region. The violence in Nigeria's northwest killed over 8,000 people from 2011 to around May 2020 (International Crisis Group, 2020). UNHCR and Government (Commission Nationale d'Eligibilite) of Niger Republic had individually registered and biometrically registered 35,499 refugees (9,728 households) in Maradi region of Niger Republic as of 29 February 2020 and within the northwest region there were some 210,000 internally displaced people (UNHCR, 2020). Amnesty International estimated that at least 1,126 people had been killed as a result of violence in the north of the country between January – June 2020, and mostly by rampaging gunmen (Amnesty International, 2020). Factors responsible for the current situation in the northwest requires a holistic approach, however farmers/herders" clashes over access to land resources had been considered as

the stimulating factor. While ecological changes and climate-induced pressures have increased conflicts in the agro-pastoral sector, the crisis also had linkages to governance crises that drive banditry in the region such as cattle rustling, illicit artisanal gold mining, proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), youth unemployment, etc, which indicate weak governance and security capacity across the affected states (WARN, 2020). This clearly indicates that the situation is more complex and comprises of other components of crime, which adds fuel to the entire crisis.

### **Emergence of the Yansakai and Fulani Militia**

The yansakai are an armed militia group, consist of largely Hausa youths and adults. The yansakai emerged in response to the constant violent attacks by bandits on their communities, and the adopted a method of response that many considered disturbing and responsible for igniting the violence. The yansakai had been accused of being responsible for the escalation of the crisis in the northwest. The yansakai were implicated in acts of criminality including human right abuses, armed robbery, extortion, appropriation of livestock and other properties from the Fulani (WARN, 2020). They were accused of targeting their victims along ethnic line and their excesses in profiling and killing ethnic Fulani men and women, was often blamed for the bandits' savage "reprisal attacks" (*Daily Trust*, 2020, "Failed peace pact with bandits'). While negotiating for peace with "armed bandits," some state governors issued proclamation outlawing the activities of the yansakai in their states whom they blamed for the escalation of the crisis. In July 2019, the governor of Zamfara state, Bello Mutawalle, was the first to enter a negotiation with the "armed bandits" followed by Governor Aminu Masari of Katsina State. Each proscribed the yansakai amidst disquiet from concern citizens who felt that it was wrong for the government to go into agreement with the bandits and feared that outlawing the yansakai would make rural communities vulnerable and defenseless since they had relatively inadequate police protection (Barje, 2020, p.131).

While the yansakai were identified as predominantly Hausa/farmers,

the bandits were only identified by the government as armed bandits or criminals. In identifying the different category of actors involved in the northwest crisis, the recent ICG report aligned with the government's position by separating the bandits whom it referred as "criminal gangs" from Fulani ethnic militia whom it referred as "herder-allied groups" (International Crisis Group, 2020, p.5).

The questions that many often avoid to tackle is whether there is a difference between the armed bandits and the Fulani ethnic militia or herder allied groups? Fulani ethnic militia is a term use to describe members of the Fulani ethnic armed vigilante group who rise up to defend the interest of the Fulani people. Such question is pertinent because the composition of the bandits terrorizing the Northwestern part of the country are predominantly Fulani. Moreover, where reprisal attacks were carried out as a result of the activities of the yansakai, it is often the leaders of the bandit group that claim responsibility (Barje, 2020). Often times, when the bandits kidnap people, part of their demands from the government were made on behalf of the Fulani people or herders, who they feel have been neglected by the government.

There is no doubt that Fulani militia group exists, but many have been skeptical of linking the existence of the Fulani vigilant group with the activities of the armed bandits. The Fulani militia variegated appearance made them vigilantes or ethnic militia by "day" and bandits by "night", with the formers' appearance remaining invincible. The Fulani militia were not invincible and the failure to track, identify and link their activities with the armed bandits by the government and security agencies created a problem that stalled the path to restoration. It is "tit for tat" kind of situation between the yansakai and the Fulani militia, attacks on communities are selective especially in the rural areas. While the yansakai target suspected Fulani rural settlements known as *ruga*, harbouring bandits, the militia in response go after Hausa communities where the yansakai operate (Barje, 2020, p.135). For the yansakai, the so called "bandits" are actually the Fulani reason why they go after them.

This article attempts to present an ethnic dimension to the northwest

crisis, surrounding the activities of the yansakai, seen as the creation of mostly Hausa communities, and the Fulani ethnic militia whose activities are intertwined with banditry. Extrapolating from the historical antecedence of the Hausa and Fulani from the jihad of 1804, the research argued that the emergence of both groups is deeply connected with conflicting relations in their histories which only resurfaced as agro-pastoral clashes. Both groups emerged in response to a need to protect their ethnic communities from perceived domination by the other. They target members of the other ethnic group with a savagery that carries a disturbing mark of ethnic cleansing.

Several researches on the Northwest security situation are explained from agro-pastoral occupational perspective of the major actors i.e., Hausa farmers and Fulani herders. This research deviates from this popular approach and tackles the much covert and obnoxious topic of ethnic animosity between the Hausa and the Fulani.

### **Historical Dynamics of the Hausa and Fulani Relation in Perspective**

For two centuries now the pastoral Fulani found in the forests and the transhumance Fulani found in northern Nigeria have succeeded in maintaining their cultural identities intact, attributable to their refrainment to intermingle either through marriage or culture with the Hausa. Similarly, the rural dwelling Hausa had also maintained segregated settlements from the Fulani and hardly intermarried with them. These two categories consist the larger population of the poor people *talakawa* in the northwest who are presently worst affected by the crisis. Contrarily, in the towns and cities for over two centuries now, the Fulani elites who form the larger bulk of sedentary Fulani had successfully intermixed with the urban Hausa dwellers making it difficult to differentiate between Fulani and Hausa in the cities. In these urban areas and in political circle, Hausa-Fulani is the new appellation used to identify the new urban class that is a mixture of both races. According to Maiangwa (2017, p.283):

After the conquests of these kingdoms, many of the Fulani jihadists integrated into Hausa land; they took on certain Hausa

cultural attributes and lifestyle, and became known as the urban Fulani. Although the two groups (urban Fulani and Hausa) are distinguishable, both groups are often regarded as one (and are commonly referred to as Hausa-Fulani). The urban Fulani, who are mostly Muslims, are often contrasted with the Fulbe or nomadic Fulani. While the majority of Fulani herders are also Muslims, it is not clear to what extent most of them practice the religion. Many of them, however, are perceived to share similar cultural traits as the urban Fulani, including the ability to speak Fulfulde (the language of Fulani people).

Notwithstanding, the urban Fulani had managed to extricate themselves from being completely intermeshed with the Hausa by maintaining cultural ties with the rural Fulani, through various Fulani cultural organizations and political interest groups.

Historically, no one is certain when precisely the Fulani began to establish settlements all over Hausa land though their arrival had been linked with itinerant preachers among them from Mali and Senegal from the fourteenth century. However, according to Kano Chronicle in the reign of Rumfa (1463–1499 CE) the Fulani were numerous all over Hausa land and Kano (Kirk-Greene, 1972, p.10). But in the reign of his father Yakubu, it was recorded that there was considerable number of Fulani and Wangara influx from Mali Empire who brought religious books (Hogben & Kirk-Greene, 1966, p.190). The Fulani were subject to the Hausa rulers and the “less-nomadic” ones amongst them began to intermarry with the Hausa (Hogben & Kirk-Greene, 1966).

However, the major catalyst in the relations of these two groups was the jihad. Spearheaded by a Fulani cleric Othman dan Fodio, the jihad was considered as a movement for the reformation of Islam from superstitious customs and practices encouraged by the ruling Hausa class, which garnered support from both Hausa *talakawa* and Fulani supporters (NAK, Kano Prof., 2568 II). Though many had established that the jihad was not in any way a conquest of the Hausa race by the Fulani, because the



Hausa adherents of Fodio were probably more numerous than his Fulani followers (Kirk-Greene, 1972; Chafe, 1999, pp.53-58). Notwithstanding, the nepotistic grasp of power after the Fulani succeeded in overthrowing the Hausa ruling class, made the Fulani completely take over the entire Hausa ruling class and administrative system (Kirk-Greene, 1972). The Fulani began to breed a new generation by intermarrying with the finest amongst the wealthy Hausa populace. The famous explorer Henry Barth (1857, p.146) observed that:

The Fulbe marry the handsome daughters of the subjugated tribe, but would not condescend to give their own daughters to the men of that tribe as wives. As far as I saw, their original type has been well preserved as yet, though by obtaining possession of wealth and comfort, their war-like character has been greatly impaired.

Over time, the composition of the newly emerged urban Fulani class successfully intermixed with the Hausa and both races became moulded into a social life and environment fashioned along Islamic fundamentals (NAK, Kano Prof., p.28). Hausa language continued to be the lingua franca throughout Hausa land, and even among the ruling Fulani dynasty, Fulfulde is rarely spoken. It is exceptionally difficult to find a Fulani who cannot not speak Hausa and it is uncommon in the urban centres to hear Fulfulde language spoken except among the cattle nomads. Meanwhile in the rural areas the situation has not changed for the Hausa *talakawa* who supported the jihad, and in the forests and bushes the pastoral Fulani were soon forgotten by their urban dwelling relatives who embraced totally new identity and hardly associate with them. Since the post jihad era, the pastoral Fulani in the bushes and forests have not enjoyed full assimilation into the mainstream social cohesion and this had been their major source of bitterness. Despite that the Fulani elite class had been greatly favoured by the British colonial government to retain considerable influence in the north above any other ethnic group (see Lugard, 1965), they failed to evolve a social plan that will civilize their rural pastoral relatives. Maiangwa agrees with those who problematize the colonial

heritage of the farmer-herder conflicts, arguing that the “the policy of restricting the mobility of pastoralists and confirming them to designated locations in order to collect taxes and demarcate fixed boundaries for purposes of state creation and economic exploitation” (Maiangwa, 2017, pp.282-3), is a significant in understanding the crisis between farmers and nomadic groups.

The plight of these poor classes who succeeded in maintaining their separate and unique cultural identities continued over the centuries as they both became dissatisfied with their new ruling and elite class. While the poor rural Hausa (whose traditional occupation was farming) feel neglected by a “foreign” ruling class who did not take active step to address the constant destruction of farmlands by the pastoralists, the Fulani on the other hand felt their brothers who hold power had done nothing to change their situation and allowed the gradual encroachment and decimation of grazing lands by an ever-growing Hausa population. In the 1960s the northern regional government established about 415 grazing reserves for the herders but most of it had been lost over the years (International Crisis Group, 2019, p.4). Out of these number only 114 had been formally demarcated and documented, but these too were not backed by legislation to guarantee exclusive usage by the herders and to deter other land users from encroachment. Gradually these reserves were lost to population growth, expanding agro-farming communities and appropriation for political reasons (Garba, 2020). Presently, the poor are estimated to consist about 80 per cent of the region’s population made up of farmers, pastoralists, agro-pastoralist and small-scale entrepreneurs (International Crisis Group, 2020). The northwest has the highest poverty rate in Nigeria, and as at 2019 all the seven states in the region had poverty index above the national average of 40.1 per cent (International Crisis Group, 2020).

### **Conceptualizing Ethnicity and Ethnicization**

Many conflicts and publications about conflicts have often been linked with either race or ethnicity. Within the African context, history has shown

that most of the violent conflicts experienced in the past have been linked with ethnic related issue. According to Holst (2012), violent conflicts are often traced back to violent contestations between ethnic groups with seemingly homogenous interest, but also in scholarly analyses where they remain as analytical framework, determined also in the area of conflict. However, ethnicity alone cannot be sufficient to explain some conflicts and is not sufficiently coherent enough to be applied in every context.

This article takes an alternative approach by looking at the concept of “ethnicization” as a processual framework of analysis” as used by Holst. This approach takes into account the power that the notion of race and ethnicity has in real life, while trying to avoid the reinforcement of the notion of homogeneity, but instead underline the processual nature of group and identity formation. It is not always easy to divert from the usual and much easier terms used in analyzing group dynamics and relations, an attempt to embrace a different approach exposes the underlying issues which are more often easily overlooked when focusing on popular categories of ethnicity (Holst, 2012, p.40).

Though the definition of ethnicity may seem blurred sometimes but Holst summarize some of the central aspects of defining ethnicity based on some scholars approach such that it is often portray as the essence of an ethnic group, to the feeling of belonging to such a group, to the marker of difference from other ethnic groups; a shared culture, a common ancestry/kinship (real or imagined) and some form of group membership (Holst, 2012, p.42).

The inclusion of all these basic factors that explains ethnicity earmarks a process which according to Eder (2002, p.17) “advance the creation of collective identities known as “ethnicization” which is seen as “the chain of events through which objective conditions of economic or political grievances become the basis of political claims justified by reference to a collective identity.” According to Holst the process leading to engendered ethnicization can often be observed from a top-down perspective, in this case the powerful elites belonging to a particular group became the centre of activism and influence. This is a clear indication that the elites

are actively able to control the processes of ethnicization while ordinary people are unaware of their manipulation. It is therefore noteworthy to point out that there are aspects of ethnicization that have become so engrained in everyday life that are difficult to identify as such, even for elite actors (Holst, 2012, pp.50-51). Other aspects may have been initiated by actors in the center of power, but may not develop along the lines of a typical instrumentalist perspective. Ironically and sometimes unknown to the silent initiators, it might even backfire and harm their interests, because of the possibility of the process being hijacked and reinforced by actors outside the typical realms of powers, who then develop their own, uncontrolled dynamics.

### **Ethnicizing and Politicizing Insecurity in Northwest Nigeria**

The flaw in the nation's security structure had left the majority of the Nigeria populace unsecured and threatened. Slow response from security agencies even when they are informed of impending attacks only compounds the woes of communities that were badly affected by the crisis. Security forces were known to respond late and arrive hours after the attacks have ended (Amnesty International, 2018). In spite of the attacks and killings that have been going for several years, many agreed that the government had been reluctant in investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of the killings which triggered the cycle of bloody violence (Amnesty International, 2018, p.7). successive Nigeria governments are fond of issuing statement after statement condemning each attack, and in most cases even when the victims recognized their attackers, the authorities have always delayed to act accordingly (Amnesty International, 2018, p.41). As much as some communities also blamed the yansakai for being responsible for the problem, notwithstanding, they felt some sense of insecurity without the yansakai.

The growing violence occasioned by the activities of the yansakai made the state governors in the northwest to outlaw their activities and operations especially in Zamfara and Katsina States. The ban placed on the activities of the yansakai followed a peace/amnesty deal initiated by

the concerned state governments with the commanders of the various units of Fulani militia who ironically are leaders of bandit groups. While the yansakai were outlawed, the Fulani militia were allowed “to continue with their normal activities” in these states, a situation that led to the breakdown of the peace deal because the militia continued with their attacks (*Daily Trust*, Failed peace pact with bandits). The Muhammadu Buhari led government was slow in taking action against the Fulani militia and the idea of negotiating deals with militia commanders of the Fulani, was condemned by government critics and ordinary citizens. Banning the yansakai without providing alternative security arrangements or improving the security structure, made several civil society groups to protest the ban of the yansakai and called for the lifting of the ban (Barje, 2020, p.136). Despite the ban, the yansakai continued to operate in several parts of the northwest.

In an attempt to stem the tide of the clashes the federal government proposed to establish cattle ranches for the Fulani across the states of the federation. But in a country widely divided by ethnic sentiments, the government’s decision drew lots of criticisms, as the action was seen to favour the Fulani. On 3 May 2019, a federal government delegation led by former Minister of Interior, Abdulrahman Dambazau and the Inspector General of Police negotiated a deal with the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) to provide N100 billion naira over a two-year period for the establishment of cattle ranches for the Fulani in various parts of the country. According to Dambazau, “the gathering is part of steps we have taken to tackle insecurity and clashes between herdsmen and farmers... That is the main reason we have come to Kebbi State, to dialogue with leaders of herdsmen as part of the process” (*Vanguard*, 2020, Killings kidnappings: Ohanaeze fumes...). Many see the action as a means to appease the Fulani militia through MACBAN, who had been accused of sponsoring and shielding the Fulani militia.

Though the IG of police denied the allegations, the National Secretary of MACBAN, Saleh Alhassan admitted that the federal government offered the Fulani N100 billion (*Punch Newspaper*, 2020, Miyeti Allah admits

clarifies N100 bn demand...). Eight weeks after that incident the federal government launched the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA). It was intended to establish ranches and settlements fully developed with dairies for milk production, houses for herders, mini-markets, schools, hospitals, vet clinics, abattoirs, mosques, road networks and dams to cater for the needs of the herdsmen. Under the planned programme the federal government would develop pasture paddocks and employ agro-rangers to oversee the RUGA.

Eleven states were identified to pilot the scheme. These are Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba, Katsina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara and Niger. Prior to RUGA, the National Economic Council (NEC) chaired by the Vice President in June 2018, initiated the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) with an estimated budget of N179 billion and a 10-year plan to develop ranching in Nigeria. It was the same plan that was transformed into the RUGA project contrary to denial by the Vice President, Yemi Osinbanjo, who through the NEC was directed to suspend the programme on 3 July 2019 following the outrage it created in the country (*Vanguard Newspaper*, 2020, Why we're suspending RUGA policy...).

Labelling the Fulani militia as armed bandits, in order to distract critics that most of the crimes were perpetrated by criminals along with Fulani elements, did not justify the actions exhibited by them. Their attacks had the marks of ethnic battle often in response to an injury and casualty on their side. The government was quick to blame the yansakai for the escalation of the conflict but acted lethargically in addressing the violent militia. The governors of northwest states had shown reluctance to prosecute known militia commanders but would rather negotiate with them. Compared to other ethnic militia commanders, who were summarily executed given the slightest opportunity, many believed the government showed more consideration to the commanders of the Fulani militia.

Many believed that if the state governors in the northwest can support the yansakai who are familiar with the terrain than the security forces,

against the so called “bandits” the issue of banditry would have been the thing of the past. But their reluctance betrayed their fears that supporting an armed yansakai against the “bandits” was inimical to raising up arms against the Fulani ethnic group.

To buttress this point, in Zuru Emirate of Kebbi State, the yansakai with the support of the elites of the state have been killing bandits who disguised as Fulani militias. Zuru is an ethnic group that is found and dominant in Kebbi State. However, MACBAN issued a statement that the yansakai in Kebbi killed 68 Fulani people in three LGAs of Kebbi state from 29 April to 11 August 2020 (*Leadership*, 2020, Miyeti Allah condemns alleged killings...). In a swift reaction to stop the killing of Fulani in Kebbi, the president sent a powerful delegation led by the Inspector General of Police Mohammed Adamu and Director General of the State Security Services (DSS) Yusuf Magaji-Bichi to bring the yansakai in Kebbi State to order in order to avoid mass reprisal killings like that of Zamfara and Katsina States which was blamed on the yansakai (*Vanguard*, 2020, Banditry in Nigeria has international dimension...).

MACBAN as an association had been accused of being linked with the Fulani militia. Many top Fulani elites in the country belong to the association. Negotiations between commanders of Fulani militias and governments had mostly been mediated through MACBAN chairmen at the various state chapters. The Fulani militia were perceived to be the militant wing of MACBAN, the position that has been betrayed by statements credited to their leaders. Attacks carried out by Fulani militia in 3 LGAs of Plateau State in June 2018 leading to loss of lives was explained as reprisal attack for the loss of 300 cows, according to chairman of MACBAN North Central Zone (*Vanguard Newspaper*, 2018, Plateau massacre retaliation for loss of 300 cows). Likewise, earlier in that year the chairman of MACBAN Benue state chapter said the attacks on Benue communities that killed 11 people was a reprisal for the stealing of 1,000 cows (BBC News Pidgin, 2018). On both occasions the national body of MACBAN disassociate itself and the entire body with the statements issued by these leaders of

the association. Notwithstanding, no arrest had been made in respect to statement that clearly implicated the branches of the MACBAN.

### **Conclusion**

The nation's ethnic divide had been the subject of debate and research considering the alacrity with which every phenomenon unveils deep seated animosity. The problem of ethnic vigilantism is not common to only the Fulani militia or the yansakai in the northwest alone. However, the emergence of many militia groups spread around the central Nigeria and northeastern part of the country is attributed to the activities of ethnic militias. Establishment of state sponsored vigilantes are gradually taking the form or gravitating towards ethnic lines. The southeast governors are also thinking of establishing a similar outfit. The idea of decentralizing the police force by creating state equivalents had been jettisoned on several occasions and some critics of the initiative often express fear that state police might be exploited along ethnic lines in many states. The government still has a long way to go in resolving conflicts associated with ethnic sentiments. Balance and unbiased policies will go a long way in solving most of these problems, the lack of political will to go after those that are known to be linked with banditry had continuously forestalled meaningful progress in the fight against banditry in the country.

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