

Review of African Political Economy >

Volume 38, 2011 - Issue 128: LAND: A NEW WAVE OF ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION IN AFRICA?

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Debates

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Pages 277-287 | Published online: 21 Jun 2011

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2011.582769>

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## DEBATE

### Who wants to be a millionaire? Nigerian youths and the commodification of kidnapping

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#### Introduction

Kidnapping has become so pervasive in Nigeria that there is now a palpable apprehension among the people who are unsure of whom the next victim will be. The crime has become a veritable commodity in the hands of its perpetrators who apparently have now made a multi-million naira business out of it.

In a number of cases, whilst agents of the state have helped to negotiate with and pay the kidnappers in order to release their victims, there are cases where employees of banks and state security agencies have allegedly colluded with kidnappers (Yun 2007, Adekoye 2009a). Kidnapping is neither historically new nor peculiar to Nigeria. Historically,

impunity. Some victims have been released after huge ransom settlements, yet others have been brutalised by kidnappers. Among reasons given for kidnapping are: for ritual sacrifice (Oguseri 2007); economics; and political vendetta.

Our analysis aims to account for this pervasive phenomenon of kidnapping in Nigeria and uncover the reasons for and predispositions to commodified kidnapping in relation to the role of the state in both the emergence and the management of kidnapping. The analysis examines some of the theoretical discussion of youth and restiveness in Africa, the nature of the Nigerian state, the social forces that impel kidnapping and it gives a conclusion.

#### Conceptual framework

As deployed in this paper, 'commodification' refers to the process of kidnapping as well as actual exchange of forcefully abducted individuals for the pecuniary gain of the perpetrators. Kidnapping is a



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# Notes

For more on ritual kidnapping, see Nigerian Tribune ([2009](#), p. 13) and Sanyaolu ([2008](#)). (All newspapers and magazines cited are those published in Nigeria, except where otherwise stated.)

Though the motive of this form of kidnap might be to liquidate business rivals, several millions of naira are usually received by the perpetrators.

Several individuals and groups have been implicated on collusion with kidnap gangs including businessmen, traditional rulers and even banks, which are said to leak the account details of their wealthy customers to the criminals (Adekoye [2009a](#)).

For more details, see Abati ([2009b](#)) and Okocha and Constance ([2009](#)).

Expatriates and nationals of developed countries are particularly targeted for huge ransoms. The Nigerian government often pays promptly to secure the release of this set of victims in order to avoid embarrassment from the international community (Akhaine [2009](#), Orji [2009](#)).

The retired general was kidnapped from his farm in Edo State and taken through the creeks to Bayelsa State in the volatile Niger Delta region.

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