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Ile-Ife violence: The inside story

By Hameed Oyegbade (Osogbo), Halima Musa (Kano), Dele Ogunyemi (Ibadan) and Musa Abdullahi Krishi (Abuj) | Publish Date: Mar 19 2017 2:00AM

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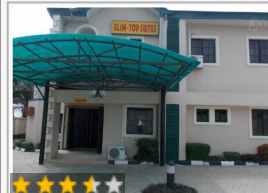
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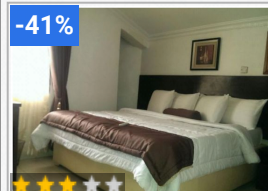
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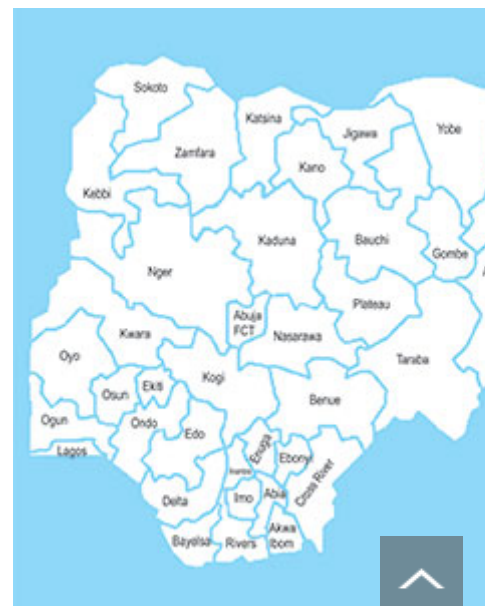
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Uppermost on the mind of Hajara Haruna is to return to the place she has always known as home, Ile-Ife, a town faraway from Unguwar Ayagi in Kano city, where she fled to a few days ago.

The widow and mother was among dozens of others who fled the ancient town of Ile-Ife in the wake of an attack which took a heavy toll on lives and property of the Hausa community there.

Fearing for their safety, Hajara and six of her children and grandchildren first escaped to Akure in Ondo State before finding their way to her father's house in Kano, where they have been taking refuge.

She was counting her 30th year in Ife when the violence broke, after what many have described as a minor scuffle between a Hausa boy and a Yoruba lady was hijacked by miscreants and turned into an attack against the entire Hausa community in the town.

"Since we have been in the town, we have never witnessed such a clash," the mother, who lost a shop in the crisis, said.

She recalled that she had never contemplated leaving Ife even after the death of her husband years ago, saying, "I decided to remain there to tend to my business because I had become used to the place."

According to her, the cause of the attack was too insignificant to have snowballed into a wanton destruction of lives and property on such a large scale.

"A woman slapped somebody and he retaliated. That should have ended there, but like a pre-planned thing, the people went wild on us, killing and setting fire on us and our property. That was savagery," she said.

Longing for Ile-Ife

According to her, most of them fled the town the very day the crisis started without taking any property along with them. "Many of us have lost everything to the fire the attackers set to our homes and shops. My shop was set ablaze. Most of us left with only the clothes on our bodies," she added.

In her own group, 22 people made the trip to Kano.

Hajara recalled how frightened they were during the attacks. "For two days we could not sleep. How could we sleep when all around us was on fire?"

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Though my house was not attacked, we were too scared to stay as they continued with the mayhem.”

On reaching Akure, they were charged N5000 each for transportation to Kano.

Despite the ugly development, Hajara said she had the intention of going back when normalcy returns. “I’m used to the area and still have some of my property there. My daughters were married there. They too have fled to the village with their husbands.”

In another part of Kano in Mariri, the wife of Alhaji Malami Nasidi, the Majidadin Sarkin Hausawan Ile-Ife, is preparing for her return to Ife, which has been scheduled for Monday, her husband told Daily Trust on Sunday.

Nasidi said he was convinced there was no more threat to keep his family away in Kano.

Even as peace is gradually returning to Ile-Ife, some victims who escaped to Ibadan are still counting their losses.

One of them, Ustaz Hafiz Kazeem, lost his house, located in Sabo area of Ile-Ife after it was torched by the hoodlums. His biggest consolation, however, is that his two wives and 10 children have all survived to tell their story.

While his family members are being sheltered in Ibadan by his brother, Aminu Kazeem, Hafiz, a timber contractor, has since returned to Ile-Ife.

The spark

All the accounts coming out of Ile-Ife have shown that there is a general consensus about the immediate cause of the violence that has turned the once bustling Sabo area into a shadow of itself.

On a fateful Monday, one Kubura Saka had a disagreement with one Abubakar Mohammed and slapped him, the popular narrative states. Kubura, being a Yoruba woman, got the support of her kinsmen from a nearby motor park. Subsequently, they beat up Mohammed, a Hausa boy. It was from that little spark that the fire started.

The Majidadin Sarkin Hausawan Ile-Ife, Nasidi, told Daily Trust on Sunday by phone that he was in the picture of the whole saga. The traditional title holder and member of the palace of the Sarkin Hausawan Ile-Ife also disclosed that Kubura had been angry with Hausa food vendors, who she had accused of messing up the frontage of her shop by spilling soup on the floor.

He said the boys were selling food in front of the shop she sells drinks. The shop, according to Nasidi, is located at Sabo Ife, near a temporary

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roadside motor park, called Abuja Park.

Kubura is the wife of a member of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Akeem Eluwole, popularly known as Escort, according to another resident of the area, the secretary of Sabo Central Mosque, Ile-Ife, Malam Nasiru Magaji, who witnessed the incident.

“She grew up in Sabo, married a Hausa man, Isiyaka, and had her first child, Ridwan with him before she later married Eluwole,” Magaji said.

The Majidadin Sarkin Hausawan Ile-Ife further recalled that: “A day before she quarreled with the boy, Kubura complained to me about the manner the boys were pouring soup all over the place, and I promised to intervene the next morning. The next day (Monday), one of the boys went to the same spot with a bowl of food. Kubura slapped him and he retaliated.

“So she went to the park and invited some Yoruba park members who descended on the boy and beat him to a pulp while we watched. Later, we intervened and pleaded with them to stop the beating, which they did,” he said.

Nasidi said the trouble appeared to have been quenched until Tuesday night when one Demola, the village head of Lawarikan, led some suspected thugs to the Sabo area, brandishing guns and knives.

“When we approached him to find out what was happening, he told us that they were ready to kill anybody. On hearing that, I called the DPO and area commander and notified them. Demola and the thugs left the area when the police arrived,” he explained.

The Sabo Mosque secretary, Magaji, said Mohammed was beaten “mercilessly to the extent that they removed his teeth.”

“Unfortunately, the drivers still mobilised themselves and started beating the Hausa people at random. A traditional ruler in Ife, the Lawarikan of Apoje Oba Ademola Ademiluyi, who is also the chairman of the motor park, was the one that asked some touts in the motor park to beat the Hausa people,” he said, corroborating Nasidi’s account on Demola.

‘Three Hours of Carnage’

There was no sign of any danger in the area when people set out for their daily activities on Wednesday morning, according Majidadi. He said their children had even gone to school as there was no reason to suspect trouble.

“I went to the bank and withdrew N8.7million to buy goods that morning. It was while in the shop of a trader that about 500 thugs invaded the Sabo area, shooting and injuring every Hausa man at sight,” he said.

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He said when the attackers started setting shops, houses and people on fire, he called Funsho, the police area commander of the area.

“He (Funsho) responded and brought the police, but he withdrew them after about an hour. It was then that I called the Ooni of Ife, who assured me that he had alerted the police. I put another call to the deputy commissioner of police, who expressed shock that the area commander had left with his men,” Nasidi narrated.

After about two hours, “soldiers and MOPOL (antiriot police)” were deployed, he said.

“But under the three hours that the violence raged, over 40 people were killed and more than 100 houses, 30 cars and 300 motorcycles burnt,” the traditional title holder said.

“On Friday (he spoke Thursday night), we buried over 46. There are still bodies in the bush. Over 30 are in critical conditions in hospitals; some of them will be transferred to Ondo for brain operations. Over 100 people have not been found. If you come to Sabo you will think there was war, but all happened within three hours,” he explained.

Majority of those killed were gold and tourmaline miners trooping to Ilesha and Ife from Zamfara State and Niger Republic to stake their claims, he said.

When our correspondent visited the area, it was full of debris, from what used to be a monument of a community's success stories. The once prosperous quarters now wear a scary and gory look. Some of the northerners who were not permanent residents of Ile-Ife were moving out of the town while the original inhabitants of Sabo remained there even though they have no place to sleep since their houses have been razed. No commercial activity is going on around the town, which is currently dominated by security men drawn from the Nigerian Army, the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Department of the State Services (DSS).

Nasidi, however, said calm has returned and the people who had fled to Ondo, Ibadan and the North were making their way back to Ife.

“My family is in Mariri in Kano, but they will return on Monday,” he said.

‘Real Reason We Were Attacked’

Leaders of the Hausa community in Sabo Ife have linked Wednesday's hostility on the community to an ongoing land tussle between a section of the Yoruba in Ile-Ife and inhabitants of the Sabo community, over ownership of the area.



They claimed the violence meted out on them was orchestrated to force them out of the place, which they said had been settled by their grandparents.

According to the Majidadin Sarkin Hausawan Sabo Ife, the contest over the ownership of the land, which the Sabo community sits, was presently before a Court of Appeal sitting in Akure. He said when the attempt to remove the Hausa community first reared its head during the reign of the late Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade, the revered traditional ruler waded into it and supported the Hausa to stay.

“The late Ooni vowed that nobody would take over the place from us as all the lands in Ife belonged to him. We thought that had settled the matter until the family that is dragging the matter with us came back three years later with an eviction notice from a High Court in the state. When we informed the late Ooni, he expressed his anger about it and advised us to appeal since the matter had gone to court. Not only that, he sent his lawyer to support our case.

“The case has been on at the Appeal Court in Akure and we are suspecting that the attack on our people was instigated because the other party in the matter has no hope that they would win the case,” he explained.

Nasidi said they couldn’t understand why somebody would be interested in removing them from a place they have been occupying for generations. “I was born here and my mother who died two years ago at the age of 80 was also born here. The Hausa people have been living in Ile-Ife, specifically, the Sabo area for close to 200 years now,” he said.

When Daily Trust on Sunday visited the residence of the Sarkin Hausawan Ile-Ife, Alhaji Mamuda Madagadi, it was gathered that he was on admission at the hospital, receiving medical treatment because of his health condition. In a previous interview with journalists, the Sarki said the incident was not a clash as it was being reported, explaining that it was an attack on the northerners in Ile-Ife.

‘We will deal with you’

Members of the Sabo community have accused some thugs in the town of referring to them as strangers and using threatening words against them, all in an effort to scare them out of the area.

Speaking about the touts, a prominent northerner in Ile-Ife, Alhaji Saidu Hussaini, alleged: “Whenever there is a slight issue, they would talk to us in a harsh manner and threaten to deal with us. The issue of the land dispute is very correct. In fact, the matter is at the Appeal Court now. They are very hostile to the Hausa people and we have been tolerating them because we know Nigeria belongs to all of us and we are in our country.”



When our correspondent visited the palace of the Ooni of Ife, it was gathered that the monarch embarked on a foreign trip after the incident. An indigene of Ile-Ife who preferred anonymity, said the monarch left the country when he was sure that normalcy had returned and there was peace in Ife.

“Kaabiesi needed to travel out. The journey had been planned a long time ago before the crisis happened. And since there is peace now with the help of the state government and the security agencies, Kaabiesi had to proceed on his trip,” he said.

Afenifere, OPC, Others Oppose Arrest of Suspected Masterminds

The police investigation team sent to Ile-Ife by the Inspector General of Police Abubakar Idris and led by a commissioner of police, Mr. Hammed Bello, has not disclosed its findings so far. Sources confirmed to Daily Trust on Sunday that Kubura, her husband (Eluwole) and the Kaabiesi Ademiluyi and many others linked with the matter have been arrested and taken to Force Headquarters in Abuja for interrogation.

Governor Aregbesola disclosed that about 20 suspects had been arrested in connection with the violence.

The second in command to the Ooni of Ife in the traditional hierarchy in Ile-Ife, the Obalufe, Oba Idowu Adediwura, condemned the mayhem and noted that it was not a clash between the Hausa and Yoruba community in Ile-Ife. He expressed worry that the way policemen were arresting Ife indigenes indiscriminately was not fair and that innocent people were being arrested.

Adediwura's worries got the attention of Governor Aregbesola, who assured that the police would do a thorough investigation, and that if any innocent person was mistakenly arrested, he would be released once there is no evidence to indict him. The governor advised him to allow the police to carry out the assignment thoroughly, and urged him to assist the police by pointing out the culprits so as to help the state to prosecute them.

The arrests have also been condemned by the Afenifere and the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC).

The Yoruba socio-political groups, Afenifere and the OPC, kicked against what they described as one-sided arrests by security agents over the recent Yoruba/Hausa clash in Ile-Ife.

According to a statement by Afenifere's national publicity secretary, Mr. Yinka Odumakin, though the group expressed concern that lives were lost in the violence, it condemned the action of security operatives for carrying out “lopsided arrests of some innocent people.”



The Afenifere, in the statement titled, 'Ife Crisis: The hounding after and Yoruba stand,' expressed worry that security operatives moved into Ife and carried out mass arrest of notable Yoruba people who could never have participated in any riot.

The statement explained that those arrested had either been taken to the state police command in Osogbo or Force Headquarters in Abuja.

Also, the National Coordinator of the OPC, Otunba Gani Adams, called for caution in the handling of the recent feud in Ife by security operatives.

In a statement by OPC's publicity secretary, Mr. Yinka Oguntimehin, the group pointed out that their hospitality should not be mistaken for cowardice.

Also, the president of Ife Progressive Forum, Lawrence Awowoyin, has condemned the indiscriminate arrest of residents by security agents following the clash between the Hausa and Yoruba communities in Sabo area. He appealed to security agents to be fair and objective in handling the crisis so as not to aggravate the existing tension.

Those who were killed have been buried in accordance to Islamic rites and government is making efforts to prevent reprisal attacks in other parts of the country.

The senior special assistant to the Osun State governor on Arewa matters, Imam Mohammed Bashir, said the dead were buried in a befitting way and prayed God to forgive their souls.

Aregbesola Gives Security Assurance, Donations

At the height of the carnage, Governor Rauf Aregbesola declared a two-day curfew between 6pm and 7am in Ile-Ife, and immediately, soldiers were deployed to the town from the Nigerian Army Engineering Construction Regiment (ECR) in Ede to support the mobile policemen who were already tackling the situation.

Aregbesola, who expressed shock over the incident, condemned the mayhem and warned that the state government would not tolerate a breach of public peace in any part of the state. Speaking through the director, Bureau of Communication and Strategy in the Office of the Governor, Mr. Semiu Okanlawon, Aregbesola assured that security forces deployed to the scene had the capacity suppress the crisis.

The governor said the breach of peace in Ile-Ife was not beyond the control of highly mobilised security forces. He assured the Hausa community in the state of adequate protection for their lives and property. He called on the citizens of the state and other tribes resident in Osun to go about their



lawful duties without fear, saying the government has put everything in place for their security.

The governor visited Ile-Ife twice after the outbreak of the violence.

Similarly, Nasidi disclosed to Daily Trust on Sunday that the governor had since released N7.5 million for the treatment of the wounded while promising to compensate all the victims of the attack.

He also said the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) had donated bags of rice and beans, as well as wrappers and mattresses to the Sabo Ife community.

The Sarkin Hausawa of Osogbo, who is the leader of all the Hausa traditional rulers in Osun State, Alhaji Lawal Gomina, in a chat with Daily Trust on Sunday, said the state government was taking care of those who sustained injuries, and that a committee had been put in place to work out modalities for compensation to those who lost their property in the crisis. He denied the insinuation that all northerners had left Ife, and explained that those who left were those who usually come to work for few months.

Also, the Minister of Interior, Lt-Gen Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau (retired), visited the scene of the Ile-Ife massacre on Thursday and commiserated with those who lost their family members to the carnage last week, saying the ancient town would remain peaceful for all. Dambazau also visited the palace of the Ooni of Ife, where he assured that every necessary step would be taken to ensure the safety of lives and property of every Nigerian residing in Ile-Ife irrespective of their ethnic background.

The minister met the leaders of the Hausa community at Sabo in Ile-Ife and condoled with the relatives of those who lost their loved ones as a result of the crisis.

According to him, "This crisis was not an ethnic issue. Some miscreants hijacked it and had a field day. It is unfortunate that they were able to perpetrate such dastardly act. This is nothing than criminal, and once they are apprehended, they should be treated as such under the law of the federation.

"I am very close to Yoruba and Ile-Ife in particular because when I served as the General Officer Commanding Second Mechanised Division, Ibadan, I realised that the Yoruba people were very accommodating. No matter where you come from, this land belongs to all of us and we must live together peacefully."

Kwankwaso calls for probe

Former governor of Kano State, Senator Rabi'u Kwankwaso, has met with northerners at Sabo, alongside Governor Aregbesola, where he insisted



that the incident must be thoroughly investigated so that the culprits would be brought to book.

Kwankwaso had said in Ile-Ife that a motion on the incident might come up on the floor of the Senate.

“It will be good if I or Senator Jide Omoworare who represents this area at the Senate, present a motion on this matter for discussion at the Senate. But I can assure you that we have done all that was needed to be done on this matter.

“What is interesting is the fact that even before presenting the matter before the Senate, we had already informed government agencies such as NEMA, through the director-general, who assured us that they would send relief materials to those who lost property,” he said.

Kwankwaso, who spoke with Daily Trust’s Hausa title, Aminiya, soon after the governor took him round the affected areas, said he was satisfied with the way he handled the matter.

“I am happy with the way the governor gathered all the stakeholders of the Ile-Ife Kingdom, although the Oni of Ife travelled out of the country at the time. We discussed and understood ourselves, as well as promised to work together with support from everybody to prevent the re-occurrence of such an incident in the future because such incident is a setback to the state and the country at large.

“As far as I know, the Hausa have been living here in Ile-Ife for over 100 years and nothing like this had happened in the past. That was why I contacted Governor Aregbesola, the Ooni of Ife and heads of security agencies immediately I heard of the incident to take urgent action to calm down the situation. And they were successful in doing that.

“I also contacted all the northern leaders and groups resident in this kingdom and assured them of the protection of their lives and property. I also thought it would be good for me to visit this kingdom to see for myself. We advised northerners resident here to be united and have a strong union of trustees and open a bank account for them to assist themselves. They assured me that they would do that in three days, and I promised that the Kwankwasiyya Foundation would assist them with N10 million to start the account,” he said.

Currently, there is a motion before the Senate, sponsored by Senator Barau Jibrin (APC, Kano) on the Ile-Ife killings.

The motion was listed on the Order Paper on Wednesday for consideration, but it was stepped down by Leave of the Senate due to the long period senators took in screening the acting chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ibrahim Magu.



The prayers of the motion were for the Senate to urge the Inspector General of Police Ibrahim Idris to probe the matter, send a delegation to commiserate with the families of the victims and meet other stakeholders, as well as observe a minute silence for those that lost their lives.

The motion was not taken throughout last week, but it might come up again this week.

Reps to Send Fact-finding Delegation

The House of Representatives had, on Tuesday, resolved to send a five-man delegation to Ile-Ife over the crisis.

The House, while adopting a motion by Rep Mohammed Sani Zorro (APC, Jigawa), said the delegation would convey its sympathy to the government and people of Osun State, the Ooni of Ife, leaders of the Hausa community and other stakeholders.

The delegation would report back to the House within two weeks for further legislative action.

Zorro told Daily Trust on Sunday on telephone yesterday that the House delegation to Ile-Ife would conduct an investigation of sorts and report back its findings.

“It is like a fact-finding delegation. Of course, a fact-finding mission is an investigation of sorts. The two committees will go and meet all the relevant stakeholders. After meeting them, they will come up with a position through a report to be laid on the floor of the House,” he said.

Zorro added that the media was culpable in the incident as it did not inform Nigerians on the true situation of things but allowed falsehood to be spread on social media.

“I must say that the mainstream media did not do much on this. The incident clearly showed that the Nigerian media is sectional. Look at the kind of reportage of the killings in Southern Kaduna. Of course, nobody is supporting such thing, but one would have expected that what happened in Ile-Ife should have been reported in the same manner.

“The mainstream media allowed the social media to cash in on what happened, with all sorts of gory images. This is one thing that we shouldn’t allow to happen.

“I must commend the state governor, who is known to be an upright person, for taking certain measures. So far, he said about 20 people have been arrested, including the immediate suspects that caused the incident. This is commendable.



"The federal government also did something commendable by sending a delegation led by the interior minister. Again, I would want to say that the traditional leaders in the area tried a lot. I don't think we should blame anybody for this incident because from available information, it wasn't a planned incident. This is something that was completely avoidable," he said.

The House, in its Tuesday resolution, urged NEMA to urgently send relief materials to the displaced victims of the disturbances who are at various facilities across the state.

The lawmakers also mandated the committees on police affairs, human rights and emergency and disaster preparedness to monitor the unfolding events.

Moving the motion, Zorro said the House noted with concern the unfortunate communal disturbances between the Yoruba and Hausa communities in Ile-Ife on March 8.

He noted the efforts of the Osun State government, the Nigeria Police Force, traditional rulers and other stakeholders at de-escalating tension and restoring normalcy in the wake of the incident.

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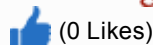
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