

Amotekun: Understanding Humans' Experience through Animals (Posted on Facebook on 01/16/2020)

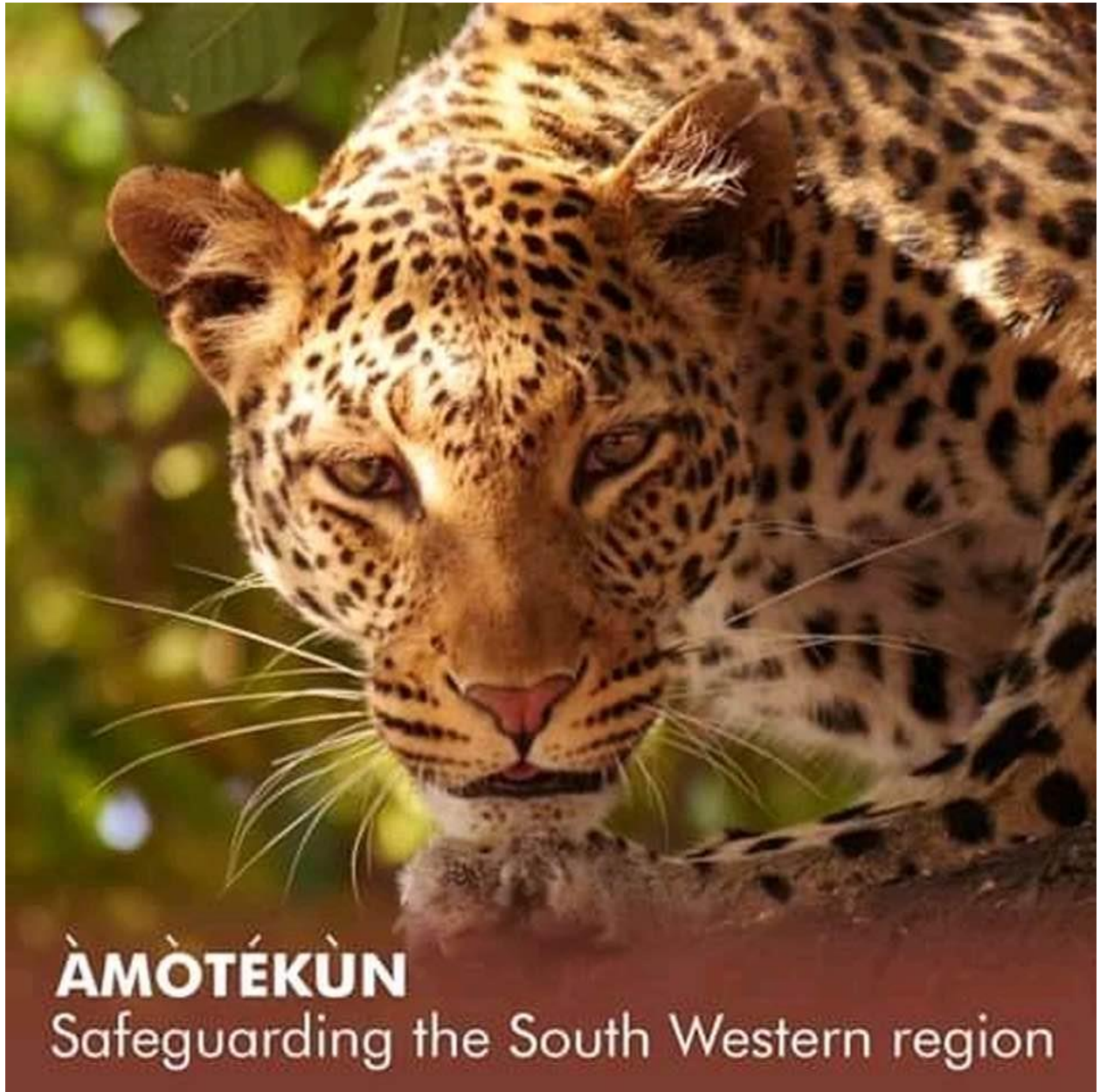
If the most important public debate in southwestern Nigeria since January 9 is the formation of the "Western Nigeria Security Network," aka Amotekun, the most visible animal has been the leopard, the mascot of the new outfit. The motivation for establishing Amotekun is clear to most people-- unprecedented insecurity, characterized by kidnapping along the inter-state and inter-city highways in southwestern Nigeria.

The choice of a wild animal to represent humans' response to insecurity should be read as humans' acknowledgment of the boundaries of their own power. Wild animals have always been humans' most effective imagination of the duality of strength and vulnerability. But, the reason the leopard, not the more ferocious lion or tiger (whose ecohistory in Africa is problematic) was adopted as the mascot of the new security outfit needs some clarification informed by ecohistory, animal behavior, and metaphor of power.

In the first place, the leopard is the fiercest of the wild cat family in southwestern Nigeria's ecological zone. For centuries, it has responded (tenaciously), to the biodiversity of the region against the odds posed by superfluous urbanization and deforestation. I was offered an entire skin for \$300 at Oje market in Ibadan last year. Today, lions are not only rare, their habitat has been restricted to northern Nigeria. A typical hunter in any rural community in southwestern Nigeria must have killed a leopard before retirement.

What is more, the leopard's reputation for surprise invasion of human settlements to steal livestock resembles the conduct of terrorists who frequently encroached Yorubaland to kidnap humans. The mode of operation of the human and animal terrorists is thus similar. Amotekun is both human and animal. In addition, the metaphor of the "criminally-minded" leopards fed into public anxiety and panic, which have historically helped powerful people to reinforce their influence. Indeed, the "man-leopard murders," the most scientific and expansive "homicide" investigation in colonial Nigeria exploited the image of the leopard. When humans failed to understand their helplessness, they take refuge in the extra-human world.

After exploiting indigenous worldview about an animal and hunting in creating Amotekun, the government ignored local hunters who felt they have a stronger agency to secure communities. For them, Amotekun is both the hunter and the hunt itself. They asserted their age-long agency to protect a modern state, arguing that they can maul the human and animal leopards. History matters in everything because it is just the only way to understand anything!



**ÀMÒTÉKÙN**

Safeguarding the South Western region