



The Paradox of Managing Ethnic Militias in Nigeria and its Implications on Socio-economic Development

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Abstract

This paper seeks to critically assess the paradox of curtailing the antics of ethnic militias and its attendant implications on socio-economic development in Nigeria. It is approximated that Nigeria is made up of 250 ethnic groups and 350 languages but only three i.e (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo) were generally recognized as the major ethnic groups. Most ethnic militias in Nigeria today have evolved due to one perceived notion or another which the ethnic nationalities feel they have suffered in the hands of the Nigerian state. For example, the O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) was formed for the purpose of integrating the aspirations and values of all the descendants of Oduduwa (Yoruba) solely because they felt that they had been denied the right and the opportunity to be in power when the June 12, 1993 general elections believed to have been won by M.K.O Abiola, a Yoruba son, was annulled. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) which is another militia group found in the South-East was formed because of the feeling of marginalization. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was also formed to emancipate the people of the oil rich region from the Nigerian state so that they can take full control of the natural resources in their land. Thus bringing to an end the long years of exploitation; which in turn is expected to improve the environmental conditions of the region and bring about development. The Bakassi Boys found in South-east Nigeria is an example of a militant group that was formed to provide additional security for people in the community, giving credence to this perspective. Boko Haram also known as the Nigerian Taliban is another militia group found mostly in north-eastern Nigeria. It is an Islamic sect opposed to western education. This group, which parades religious extremists pushing for the enthronement of Sharia and abandonment of western education in the region and Nigeria as a whole, has always sent jitters down the spines of old and young in the North Eastern states of Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba respectively. The recent Ombatse militia group in Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria claiming to be fighting for injustice perpetrated on the Eggon nation has caused a lot of damage as many security operatives as well as civilian were killed and families displaced. The findings of the study shows that the activities of militants have impacted negatively on the socio-economic development of Nigeria as a nation since enormous resources is deployed daily for the protection of Nigeria's sovereignty due to the antics of militant groups. Therefore, the paper recommended the use of intelligence gathering in place of crude force due to the advancement of technology in global crimes.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with diverse culture, languages, ethnic groups, religion, traditions, and customs. The various ethnic nationalities are either referred to as majority or minority groups. The Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo are recognized as the major ethnic groups while the other ethnic nationalities are regarded as minority groups. This scenario created an avenue for imbalance in the level of development within the Nigerian state. By implication, the fear of domination and inability of each region to surrender their powers led the introduction of a federal system of government which welcomes the idea of power sharing between the federal and the component units.

After the attainment of independence from the British in 1960, most of the existing political parties were regionally based in attempts to protect the interest of their regions at the expense of Nigeria as a nation. For instance, the major objective of Action Group (AG) was to development the western region, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was preoccupied with Northern agenda while the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) focused on the liberation of Ibo nations from the hegemony of western and northern region. Their agitations for individual- selfish, sentimental, and primordial agenda resulted into the election and population census crises during the first republic. Eventually, the military toppled the civilian administration in 1966, due to the corrupt and primordial tendencies of politicians.

The formation of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was to protect the interest of the Igbo Nation due to perceived injustice melted to them by other ethnic groups. The activities of MASSOB eventually snow bud into a full scale civil war which shook Nigeria as a nation to it foundation. As if that was not enough, the annulment of June, 12, 1993 general election popularly won by Chief MKO Abiola during the administration of General Ibrahim Badamonsi Babangadi nearly turn Nigeria apart. Subsequently, the O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) was formed for the purpose of integrating the aspirations and values of all the descendants of Oduduwa (Yoruba) solely because they felt that they had been denied the right and opportunity to be in power. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was also formed to emancipate the people of the oil rich region from the Nigerian state so that they can take full control of the natural resources in their land. Boko Haram also known as the Nigerian Taliban is another militia group found mostly in north-eastern Nigeria. It is an Islamic sect opposed to western education. This group parades religious extremists pushing for the enthronement of Sharia and abandonment of western education in the region and Nigeria as a whole. Lastly, the recent Ombatse militia group in Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria claiming to be fighting for injustice perpetrated on the Eggon nation has caused a lot of damage as many security operatives as well as civilian were killed and families displaced. According to Anifowoshe, (2000), the origin of the OPC, MASSOB, APC, Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, and the other ethnic militias can generally be traced to the mass misgivings over perceived political marginalisation, poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructure and state welfare programmes as well as the perceived inefficient and corrupt state system.

In view of the foregoing background to this study, one cannot deny the fact that most ethnic militias in Nigeria have done more harm than good to the corporate existence of Nigeria and the attainment of socio-economic development. In fact, since independent till-date various ethnic have been pursuing personal and self seeking agenda at the expense of Nigeria as a nation. By implications, the activities of ethnic militias has wreck a lot of havoc on the socio-economic development of Nigeria in the area of colossal loss in human and material resources, moral decadence, hooliganism, culture of impunity, politics of bitterness, blood sucking and power drunk politicking. It is against this back drop that this paper seeks to critically assess the impacts of ethnic militia actions on socio-economic development in Nigeria with a view to effectively managing and containing the nefarious, notorious and clandestine activities of ethnic militias.

2. Objective of the Paper

The objectives of this paper are:

- (a) Examine the various theoretical underpinning for the emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria.
- (b) Determine the implications of ethnic militia activities on socio-economic development in Nigeria.
- (c) Recommend measures for curtaining the excesses of ethnic militia in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The sources of data used for this paper is documentary in nature. This involves the content analysis of facts, records, and documents. The documents and records include journals, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, official publications, and internet facilities. Conclusion was drawn and recommendations made after the critical analysis secondary data(s).

4. Conceptual Analysis

4.1. Ethnic Militia

The concept “ethnic militia” has been defined in various ways by numerous scholars and security operatives based on their intellectual orientation and the kind of environment they found themselves. According to Hazen and Horner, (2007), ethnic militias are youth groups formed to promote and protect the socio-political and economic interest of a specific group. They are groups of armed individuals operating across and beyond state borders (Yakubu, 2005). Ethnic militias are not rebel movements; they are not seeking to take over the reins of political power; though they sometimes operate like the terrorist groups, but they serve as pressure group on the government. They belief in fighting mass misgivings over perceived political marginalization, poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructure and state welfare programmes as well as the perceived inefficient and corrupt state security system (Agbu,2004).

4.2. Poverty

The concept of “poverty” has attracted pervasive attention by the civil society, global bodies, scholars, and politicians alike owing to its effects all facet of human existence. However, it is difficult, if not impossible to come up with an all purpose definition of poverty, since poverty is generic in nature. By implications, what may be termed poor may not be seen as poor by the other people. Onokerhoraye (2001) in Edoh (2003) states two issues that have been consistent in the attempt to define poverty. These are the questions of: Who are the poor and at what level is poverty defined? Conventional definitions in attempt to come to terms with these issues consistently conceive poverty as an economic issue. This is measured either as a minimum flow of real income per capita, or as a bundle of basic needs which may be qualified. Social Scientists on the other hand recognize the need for broadening the definition of poverty. To this end, Kankwenda (2003) defines poverty as a multidimensional phenomena influenced by a wide range of factors; these include poor people lack of access to income earning and productive activities and to essential social services. The Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 seems to shed more light on what really constitutes poverty when it asserts that:

Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of Income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition, ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services, increase morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments, social discriminations and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision and in civil, social and cultural life (Edoh 2003:68).

To Adejo (2006) poverty can be manifested in poverty of history, poverty of intellect and poverty of ideology. In any case the deprived are usually the poor. These are people of insufficient income, inadequate food intake, lack basic healthcare, lack shelter and safe drinking water, poor environmental cleanliness, lack access to basic education and skills, ignorant of fundamental human rights, and access to information.

4.3. Development

Attempts by scholars to define the concept of development have generated a lot of controversies among authors in the field of social sciences. Some looked at it from a narrow perspective while others

considered it from a broad view points. The term ‘development’ refers to the conscious action by utilizing in a co-coordinated way the resources available to a given political unit (Bernstein, 1978). To Rodney (1972), “development in human society is many – sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skilled and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self – discipline, responsibility and material well – being. At the level of social group, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationship. The above definition shows that development goes beyond economic indicators. In the same vein, Todaro (1985), define development as:

a multi –dimensional process involving the re–organization and re – orientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves, in addition to improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs.

Todaro in the above definition views development from holistic perspectives. To him, development is the total transformation in all facets of life of the people in a given society. On the other hand, Seer (1969) focused on the improvement in the living condition of individual; in his words:

The question to ask about a country’s development is therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high level, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development for the concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially of all the three, it would be strange to call the result development, even if per capital income doubled (Seers, 1969).

The above view infers that gradual increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) may not have positive impact in the life of the people, if there is high level of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Based on the foregoing definitions, we could agree with Todaro that the objective of development are concerned with life sustenance, self – esteem or respect and freedom. Life sustenance is concerned with access to basic human needs without which life would be impossible. These things include food, shelter, health and protection. The second feature of development is self – esteem and self - respect. It is the wish of every society to be respected. To this end, most society pursued those things that would give them the necessary respect. These things include wealth and technological development. Lastly, freedom as used in this context means emancipation from alienating materials conditions of life and freedom from the social servitude of men and nature, ignorance or misery, institution and dogmatic belief. Also, Simon (2004) sees development as an improvement in quality of life (not just material standard of living) in both quantitative terms. He opines that development must be seen as actually and temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, space, society, and culture. Development is the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc; the process of producing or creating something new (Hornby, 2001). This definition implies that development involves a gradual or advancement through progressive changes

Development according to Rodney (1976) is the ability of the State to harness its natural resources or endowment for the well-being of the citizens. But Sen (1989) views the concept as encompassing the economic, political, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. While economic and social progress and the elimination of poverty are the objectives of development, it includes also freedom from fear and arbitrary arrest; free speech, free association and the right to Vote and be voted for.

4.4. Security

From a layman perspective, the concepts of “security” connote a state of peace and tranquility without any threat to live and properties. However, the meaning of security is much deeper than the above point of view. In the opinion of Otto and Ukpere (2012), security relates to the presence of peace, safety, happiness, and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis. It is a situation whereby a conducive atmosphere is created within which the people in the state can go about their normal daily activities without threat to either their lives or property. Thus, security encompasses all approach towards safeguarding human as well as material resources in the state

against all forms of aggression or violent conducts. By implication, security is synonymous to freedom from danger, and doubt among others.

For the Commission on Human Security (2003), human security is the protection of important aspect of human lives in a way that would enhance human freedoms and fulfillment. Human security encompasses freedom from want, harm, fear and the freedom to take appropriate actions without any form of hindrance. It is also the assurance of future well being and freedom from threat. Williams (2008) who sees security from the socio-political perspective averred that security involves the capacity to pursue cherished political and social ambitions. That is, security is socio-political in nature as without security there can be no political stability and consequently social activities will be in chaos. Palme (1992) argues that there is a connection between security and survival. For him, security is a basic condition for the survival of human beings. Thus, security is synonymous to freedom from danger, fear and doubt among others. Security, Nwagboso (2012) argues is an essential concept which is commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to the survival of individuals or groups. Thus, for him, security can be equated with freedom from present and future danger, harm or anxiety however, security may not be the absence of threats but it is the ability to respond to these threats with appropriate skill and expertise.

5. Theoretical Underpinning for the Resurgence of Ethnic Militias in Nigeria

Several scholars have attempted to come up with relevant theories on the activities of ethnic militia. Prominent among them was Anifowoshe (2000) who identified three probable theoretical explanations for the resurgence of civil violence in Nigeria. The first, which derives from psychological studies, is what he terms the “relative deprivation, rising expectation and frustration-aggression hypotheses”. The central thrust of this school of thought is that aggression is always the result of frustration and anger, especially when we feel thwarted in our attempt to get something we want. We are likely to get angry, and when we get angry, the most satisfying inherent response is to strike out at the source of frustration. Anifowoshe (2000), observes that the origins of the O’dua Peoples Congress and the other ethnic militias are traceable to mass misgivings over perceived political marginalisation, poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructure and state welfare programmes as well as the perceived inefficient and corrupt state security system. He therefore notes that an effusion of rising expectations that have generally remained unsatisfied accompanied the advent of the present democratic dispensation.

The second systemic model which he identified just as Nnoli (1995a) contended is the widespread belief that there is a paradoxical relationship between modernization and political disorder. Most post-colonial African states are going through a period in history in which there is tremendous stress and strain on the traditional, social, economic, and political systems. In fact, it is a period in history that I have referred to in various other writings as one of “total crises” (Agbu, 2001). It therefore follows that in a society in which modernizing leaders for example, rapidly expand education by increasing the number of educated persons without the corresponding increase in levels of economic opportunities, there will most probably be some sort of political anomie. In view of the above, Anifowoshe (2000) argued that: certainly the case in the Nigerian urban towns of Lagos, Onitsha, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna and Aba where many youths who drifted there found themselves unemployed, underemployed or even unemployable. Ultimately, this group of urban dwellers becomes a ready base for recruitment as criminals, *area boys and girls* and members of ethnic militias.

The third is the “group conflict model” which sees violence as a product of a struggle among various groups within the society. Proponents of this school of thought readily identify the various cleavages existing in the society such as ethnic, regional, political, and religious cleavages as possible sources of civil violence. Though this view fails to explain why there still exist multi-ethnic communities who have lived in harmony for ages without serious conflicts, it nevertheless provides a plausible explanation of the possible causes of conflicts in divided societies.

Finally, the obviously problematic connection between democratisation, ethnic sub-nationalism, and violence was very well put by Anugwon (2000), who insists that ethnic conflicts negate the developmental function of democracy and may ultimately attack the roots of democracy in a society. He however observes that the existence of minimal ethnic conflicts or rivalry in ethnically plural

societies is to be expected. He further argues that when these conflicts are minimal or dissociated, they may be regarded as dynamic forces that help to propel the development of a society. Though conflict is a principal variable for explaining social change in the society, it becomes detrimental to the consolidation of democracy when it is extreme. The situation in Nigeria and events in Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire or even far-flung places like the Balkans and the Middle East easily bear this out.

6. Implications of Ethnic Militia Activities on Socio-economic Development in Nigeria

According to Agbu (2004), the specific emergence of the phenomenon of ethnic militias as a specific challenge to the Nigerian nation-state project cannot be divorced from the opening up of the political space for the exercise of rights and for electoral activities. For years, the military held sway under the jackboots of authoritarian leaders like Muhammadu Buhari (1983–1985), Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) and the late Sani Abacha (1993–1998). The result of course, was that arbitrariness and mediocrity were consciously and unconsciously celebrated and a gradual but steady militarisation of the Nigerian society continued until the successful elections of 1999 that led to the emergence of a new democratic rule. Before 1999,

Since January 1914 when Nigeria was created by Britain, several fundamental ethno-religious issues have been acting to tear the country apart. Nigeria's political leadership has bluntly and dangerously refused to sincerely assemble the ethnic nationalities together in a National Conference that is people oriented to discuss how they would like to live together in peace. This failure has resulted in sectional riots, agitations, uprisings, civil unrest and now persistent militant groups inflicting terror on and making Nigeria unsafe. In the present day Nigeria, the three dominating ethnic groups (Igbo, Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba) constitute the main sources of Nigeria's ethnic abuses.. They were the ones who abused ethnicity in 1952/53. They were the ones who masterminded the splitting of Nigerian into three regions. During the first Republic. Despite the existence of Federal Character Commission, quota system, zoning or rotational principles in some laws in Nigeria, they still insist that there are majorities and they are the majorities who must continue to see the rest ethnic groups as small peoples that must be suppressed, marginalized, disrespected and dominated even in the affairs of the minorities. It was they who elevated the cheating of the minorities to high havens that led to minorities' unrests. These arguments led to the requests for the creation of regions, states and local governments. In these creations, no lessons were learnt that once more than one group of people are joined into one political unit, the bigger one would want to dominate and this had been breeding inter-ethnic abuses and conflicts destroying Nigeria's socio-economic development.

The lack of consensus amongst ethnic nationalities in Nigerians is one of the most fundamental challenges of Nigeria's socio-economic development. This is simply because all the ethnic groups have never sat down to agree on how to live together in a harmonious co-existence that can guarantee and sustain socio-economic development. This problem had created mutual suspicion, hate and lack of tolerance. It is only consensus that can bring solution to the unceasing Igbo-Nigeria sentiments, Berom-Fulani killings in Jos, Ogoni-Okrika and Rebisi-Okrika wars all in Rivers State, Fulani-Alago and Ombatshe-Assakio conflicts all in Nasarawa State, Fulani-Agatu crisis in Benue State, Zango-Kataf crisis in Kaduna State, Amuleri-Aguleri in Anambra, Ife-Modakeke in Osun State, Itshekiri-Ijaw in Delta State etc. These conflicts have claimed lives of many Nigerians and properties worth millions of Naira destroyed. So in an Ijaw-dominated and colonized Niger Delta, would these same scenarios not replicate itself? Has the Ijaw learnt any lesson from the Igbo situation in the former Eastern Region? Ijaw imperialism is no solution to the development of the Niger Delta. Rather it will be fierce struggle among the ethnic groups, sabotage actions against one another. The solution is to create a Niger Delta Region comprising all the different ethnic groups provided they all have reached a consensus on how they would live together. This is surely not what Ijaw alone can determine and impose on the rest. A better solution is to split Nigeria into ethnic states; no state should have two different ethnic groups in it. Different ethnic states can agree to merge into a region. In the case of Niger Delta Region, it should comprise of Ikwerre State, Ijaw State(s), Ogoni State, Effik State, Ibibio State, Ekpeye State, Ogba State, Urhobo State, Itshekiri State, Isoko State, Etche State etc. Every state must depend on its resources and hardwork for survival. Or create an Ijaw Region with many states all

belonging to Ijaw. All these perceived tendencies of inter-tribal rivalry and conflicts are clear indications of impacting negatively on socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Today, Northern Nigeria especially in the North-Eastern states is highly insecure due to the operations of Boko Haram, a militant religious sect that insists they would want to have Nigeria Islamized; otherwise, they would continue to kill Nigerians daily with knives, guns, bombs and charms. To resolve this, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), on 17th April 2013, set up a 26-man panel to consider the matter and make appropriate recommendations. Recall that amnesty was granted to the Niger Delta militants in 2009 when they argued that Niger Delta, which produces crude oil and gas contributing over 80% of Nigeria's foreign exchange revenue, had long been neglected and undeveloped. Northern Nigeria has been unhappy with the granting of amnesty to the Niger Delta militants because it gave Niger Delta more access to Nigeria's funds than the other parts of the country. Therefore, the North needed amnesty for Boko Haram. Today, there are no more serious commercial-social activities taking place in the north-eastern Nigeria because of the activities of Boko Haram. Thus, reducing the economic and social development of the region and Nigeria as a whole. To day the Nigerian state has adopted the amnesty policy in reducing to some certain extent the militia activities in the Niger-Delta region. Therefore, the integration calculus of Nigeria's amnesty must define those variables it seeks to manipulate. The variables include the goal of the agitation, sectionalism, rehabilitation, arms surrender, dialogue, and killing of fellow Nigerians, facelessness and selfishness. When amnesty was used for the Niger Delta militancy, these variables reacted wildly. The same analysis may be the end result in the Boko Haram's case.

In Nigeria, we have had several of such struggles against the Nigerian State. There were the resistance by the North not to be joined together with the South to form Nigeria, the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, the nationalists' agitations, the Eastern Minorities agitations, the agitation by the Yorubas of Western Nigeria against the imposition of the late Chief S. L. Akintola as the leader of the Yoruba (which led to the imprisonment of Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was later granted amnesty by General Gowon) and the middle-belt riots against the "perceived neglect and oppressive policies of the ruling Northern Peoples Congress (NPC)...". All these agitations were for the common good and executed without arms.

Next were the Isaac Adaka Boro's Ijaw uprising and the Biafran struggle led by Odimegwu Ojukwu. The FGN quelled the agitation and charged Boro for treason for which he was jailed; but later granted amnesty by General Gowon in May 1967; while Ojukwu was also granted amnesty during the Second Republic. These struggles were for the common good but arms were used. The leaders never purposely killed their people to prosecute the struggles; neither did they solicit for amnesty.

Others were the Ogoni Revolution, Niger Delta militancy, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys, Bakassi Boys, Arewa Boys and now Boko Haram. Except the Ogoni Revolution and MASSOB, the rest had been in the main for the selfish interest of the organizers and executed with arms, bombs and charms. OPC is a little in-between.

The current security tension in Nigeria is the Boko Haram. In Northern Nigeria today, life is almost at the mercy of Boko Haram. They say they want total Islamisation of Nigeria. Boko Haram has been killing and destroying lives and properties in Northern Nigeria especially in Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Kaduna, Adamawa, Kano and so many other places. These militia activities is causing serious civil unrest, and more agitations and hesitations are gradually eluding the ethnic nationalities in the Nigerian state. The negative implication is that, socio-economic activities are declining at alarming rate.

Remember that in the midst of these militancy groups are other insecurity breeding intra/inter-community conflicts that consume thousands of lives and properties worth millions of Naira destroyed. They include the Tiv versus Jukun, Berom versus Fulani, Amuleri versus Aguleri, Ife versus Modakeke, Ogoni versus Okrika, Hausa-Elele versus Ikwerre and Ahoada communities, Rebisi versus Okrika, Zango-Kataf crisis, Choba killings and rapes, Umuechem, Odi and Zaki-Biam massacres etc. In some of these conflicts, government had always set up committees to investigate the causes of the fights and recommend solutions. Yet, no solutions! It is the unsatisfactory management of these agitations that remain a source of hate, huge regrets, psychic pains, anger, bitterness and intolerance among the peoples of Nigeria.

Nigeria has experienced years of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims and endured massacres and bombings by religiously-inspired groups like Boko Haram. Now, however,

with the slaughter of as many as 90 members of Nigeria's security forces, practitioners of one of Nigeria's many forms of traditional religion have challenged the state's authority in central Nigeria's Nasarawa State, lying roughly on the dividing line between the Muslim majority north and the Christian majority south. The Ombatse cult is based on traditional forms of worship practiced by the Eggon ethnic group. The Eggon people of Nasarawa State are roughly divided in their religious allegiance to Christianity and Islam, but many see no contradiction in also following more traditional belief systems. The Eggon speak their own Benue-Congo language (Eggon), though traditional oral histories of the group trace their origin to Yemen. Today, they are concentrated in the Lafia, Akwanga and Nasarawa-Eggon districts of Nasarawa State.

Though Ombatse (meaning "Time has Come") has kept a relatively low profile for some years despite occasional clashes with non-Eggon neighbors and police, the traditional religious movement has embarked on a violent campaign of moral and spiritual reform implemented through forced conversions, though the campaign also draws on currents of political frustration and perennial disputes with semi-nomadic herders like the Fulani, who use the same land as sedentary agriculturalists like the Eggon. Ombatse was allegedly formed as the result of a revelation received in a dream that called for male Eggons to purify society and rid it of social evils such as promiscuity, adultery, crime, alcohol consumption and smoking (*Daily Trust* (Lagos), November 25, 2012). One Ombatse member described the group's focus: "The sect is highly purified and its members are not into alcoholism, sexual intercourse and stealing. Our members are highly moral and dedicated to their cause only" (BBC Hausa, May 10). The group's founders have been identified as movement chairman Haruna Musa Zico Kigbu, movement secretary Zabura Musa Akwanshiki, Sgt. Alaku Ehe, Shuaibu Alkali, Iliyasu Hassan Gyabo and Abdullahi Usman.

According to the Ombatse chairman: "The religion had existed since time immemorial with a shrine 'Azhili' interceding for the people. Consequently, people linked with the 'Ombatse Group' usually ask the shrine for rain, good harvest and many other fortunes. Therefore, Ombatse Group is not a [form of] witchcraft; neither does it have anything to do with fighting wars" (*National Mirror* [Lagos], December 2, 2012). Ombatse spokesman, Zachary Zamani Allumaga, explained the purpose of the movement and its origins in a December, 2012 interview with a Nigerian daily.

The invasion of the Europeans, Christianity and the Islamic jihad, all these influx changed the status quo. Our forefathers had their own way of worship which is the traditional way of worship before the influx. The coming of these foreigners infiltrated the place and consequently affected their style of worship. My father who is still alive practiced both the traditional religion and Christianity and he is still alive. I also have an uncle who is a Muslim and at the same time practices the traditional religion. These have all tested the two divides. I am a confirmed communicant Catholic and at the same time too, a traditional worshipper. Now, what led to us bringing back this traditional worship to our people is because of the complaints we receive every now and then from our people about the evil and vices that have pervaded our society and our state. These things were not there according to what our fathers told us. The society used to be serene and orderly till the advent of the foreigners. Some of those societal ills include murder, theft, rumor mongering, secret society and witchcraft (*Vanguard* [Lagos], December 22, 2012).

Ombatse members typically wear black clothing and bundles of charms to provide magical protection from gunfire. There is little place for women in Ombatse and they are barred from entering Ombatse shrines. Both Ombatse leaders and their opponents point out that not all Eggon are members of the traditional cult. Ombatse and all other ethnic militias in Nasarawa State were officially banned in late 2012.

6.1. Spiraling Violence in the Eggon Community

A pattern of worsening communal and religiously-inspired violence has emerged over last in Nasarawa State between 2012 and 2013

- June 2012 – Communal violence erupts between the Eggon and the Alago ethnic group. The latter took the worst of it, complaining that local security forces were unwilling to intervene against the Ombatse militia (*Leadership* [Abuja], July 1; *Daily Trust* [Lagos], January 19).
- Mid-October, 2012 – Several clashes erupt between Eggon and Fulani. Many of the dead were reported mutilated by machetes (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], January 19).

- November 17, 2012 – An attempt by Nigerian security forces to raid the Allogani cult center in the Nasarawa-Eggon district on November 17 to arrest the Ombatse chairman and secretary while they were conducting an initiation and oath-taking ceremony resulted in a gunfight in which three soldiers were shot. Hours later, cult members set up a barricade on the Lafia-Akwanga road and smashed cars that attempted to evade the barricade. Security forces endured abuse from the drivers of long lines of halted vehicles for their failure to remove the barricades (*Sunday Trust* [Lagos], November 18, 2012). The raid brought Ombatse into conflict with the state; according to Ombatse spokesman Zachary Zamani Allumaga: “What happened that day at the Azhili shrine when the security operatives invaded us was reminiscent of what terrorists would do by using a suicide bomber to bomb a church. I can’t still imagine” (*Vanguard* [Lagos], December 22, 2012).
- November 21, 2012 – Violence erupted in Agyaragu, a suburb of the state capital of Lafia, when Ombatse killed at least ten people of the Christian and animist Koro ethnic group (a.k.a. Jijili, Migili) with firearms, machetes and axes. Some 50 homes were also burnt to the ground (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], November 21, 2012; November 25, 2012). Following the incident, Ombatse chairman Haruna Musa Zico Kigbu denied his movement had anything to do with the communal violence: “As far as we are concerned, our rules forbid members from starting a fight and killing, and as such, we cannot be connected with violence” (*Daily Independent* [Lagos], December 12, 2012).
- January 9-14, 2013 – Seven Fulani were killed by Ombatse members in a pair of remote villages in Nasarawa State. The Ombatse members also killed a large number of Fulani-owned cattle, which they leave behind in accordance with their beliefs. Dozens may have been killed in the retaliatory fighting that followed (*Royal Times of Nigeria*, January 14; *Daily Trust* [Lagos], January 19).
- January 13, 2013 – Five Ombatse members were killed by security forces when they tried to prevent the seizure of a large quantity of arms and ammunition (*Royal Times of Nigeria*, January 14).
- February 7, 2013 - Four villages and towns in Nasarawa State experience Fulani vs. Eggon violence. Both Eggon and Fulani blamed the other ethnic group for initiating the fighting (*Sunday Trust* [Lagos], February 10; *Leadership* [Abuja], March 22).

6.2. The Alakyo Massacre

If Ombatse had escaped national attention so far by being classed as yet another ethnic militia clashing with its neighbors in a relatively obscure part of the country, the movement seized national and even international headlines with a massive and deadly ambush of state security forces on their way to raid the Ombatse shrine in Alakyo (six miles outside the state capital of Lafia). The May 9 raid was launched to arrest the movement’s leader after local people had complained the religious movement was carrying out forced conversions and oath-taking in regional churches and mosques. Ombatse members claimed a total of 95 policemen and state security agents were killed, while police have admitted to 30, with seven still missing (*Nigerian Tribune*, May 9; AFP, May 9). Most media reports suggested a figure in the range of 55 to 65 dead, but a nurse reported a local hospital had received 90 corpses and was awaiting the arrival of another 17 (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], May 11). Police later revealed that four policemen were still being held hostage by the Ombatse. According to one report, the failed raid was carried out without proper clearance from Abuja and a local military unit declined to join the police and state security men in the raid on these grounds (*Premium Times* [Abuja], May 12).

After the slaughter, the bodies of the security men were burned beyond recognition in large fires. One veteran police respondent described it as “the most cold-blooded act I have witnessed against the law enforcement community in my three decades in the force” (*Premium Times* [Abuja], May 10). Large scale protests by the wives and families of the deceased have paralyzed the state capital as the charred bodies are gradually brought into Lafia. An Ombatse member described how cult members had heard rumors for days that security forces were preparing to arrest the cult leader. Remaining vigilant, they intercepted 12 trucks full of heavily armed policemen who claimed they were not going to the cult shrine: “We said we did not agree. Suddenly, they threw tear gas at us and it did not affect us. Next, they opened fire and killed nine of our members, and we retaliated by using axes to hack them to death” (BBC Hausa, May 10). Another Ombatse member told a Nigerian news agency: “In

self-defense we killed 95 of them, we have no guns. It was machetes that we used in defending ourselves and eventually [we] killed them” (Sahara Reporters [Lagos], May 9).

One officer speaking on behalf of nine other police survivors said it was plain the militia was aware of their coming and had set up an ambush at a particularly narrow part of the road. Perhaps reflecting a common spiritual base with the attackers, the officer recounted that the heavy fire of the security forces was “futile, as bullets were not penetrating them” (*Leadership* [Abuja], May 10). While the ten survivors, many of them wounded, succeeded in escaping in the last truck in the convoy, other officers who tried to flee into the bush were pursued and cut down with machetes. The attackers seized a considerable quantity of arms that will make them an even more potent force on their home ground. Most alarming was the fact that great lengths had been taken to keep the timing and destination of the security convoy a secret, even to the extent that most of the men did not know where they were going. As one police officer remarked: “That the cultists would anticipate and wreck this kind of attack on security people speaks volumes of either infiltration or mission betrayal” (*Premium Times* [Abuja], May 10). Two police corporals of Eggon origin were eventually arrested on charges of leaking information regarding the raid to Ombatse. At the time of their arrest they were in possession of three AK-47 rifles and a large quantity of charms (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], May 11).

Some Eggon claim to have engineered the election of Nasarawa State governor Umaru Tanko al-Makura (a non-Eggon Muslim) by invoking the intervention of the Ombatse shrine. However, al-Makura has since fallen out of favor with the Eggon. Allumaga and other Ombatse leaders now accuse successive Muslim governors of Nasarawa State of attempting to carry out an “ethnic cleansing” of Eggon from parts of the state (*Nigerian Tribune*, May 12). Many Eggon are now supporting the candidacy of a fellow Eggon, current state minister of information Labaran Maku, in the 2015 election for governor. Ethnic militias have frequently been formed and deployed for intimidation purposes in Nigerian electoral contests and there are some in the state capital of Lafia who believe Ombatse has a political purpose related to the inability of the Eggon to produce a governor from their own group despite their numbers in the state. The militia may in this sense be part of an effort to rally the frequently disunited Eggon behind a single purpose through oath-taking and appeals to traditional norms (*Premium Times* [Abuja], May 10).

The Nasarawa Commissioner for Information, Hamza Elayo, has suggested that some Eggon politicians may have recruited Ombatse to further their cause: “It is obvious they are being sponsored by some ambitious politicians... The security agencies have been closing in on such politicians but I don’t want to mention names” (AFP, May 9). An official statement by Governor al-Makura confirmed the administration’s view that the Ombatse violence was political rather than religious in nature: “The crisis has no religious [dimension] as speculated by some sections of the media; some people are just bent on destroying the state because they feel they are not in power” (*Premium Times* [Abuja], May 12).

One cannot deny the fact that the activities of ethnic militias have impacted negatively on the standard of living of average citizens since funds meant for the provisions social amenities and physical infrastructures have been budgeted for security votes. For instance, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) documents show the percentages of structural unemployment and the attendant social unrest in Nigeria. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) provided data on hunger and food insecurity. Bleak accounts from UN Women indicated that violence against women seems unabated. The ILO’s report *Ending Child Labour in Domestic Work*, as of June 2013, shows that 15.5 million children under 18 years work as domestic labourers. Of them, 10 million work in “conditions tantamount to slavery”. These are mainly young girls (73 per cent), who have forfeited their childhood and right to education. The International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) representative in Nigeria, W. Scott Rogers, observed that there is a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for Nigeria at 7.2 per cent while 62 per cent of Nigerians still live below the poverty line.

As noted by Ovwasa (2000), evidence abounds to illustrate that Nigeria is a poor nation. This position is justified because a large percentage of the population lives below the poverty line. Socio-economic indicators also present a pale picture of the situation.

Four decades after independence, Nigeria remains a poor country with an annual per capital income of barely \$300. This figure is below the sub-Saharan average of \$450 (AFPODEV, 2006). At the dawn of the third millennium, approximately 70 percent of the population still lived on less than US \$1 a day, an indication of extreme poverty. Real GDP growth has remained sluggish averaging 3.5 per cent per

annum since 2000 (AFRODAD, 2005: iv & 1). Furthermore, Igbuzor (2006) observes that Nigeria is among the 20 countries in the world with the widest gap between the rich and the poor.

According to Earth Trends (2003), the total income earned by the richest 20 percent of the population is 55.7 percent while the total income earned by the poorest 20 percent is 4.4 percent. In terms of human development index, Nigeria is ranked 158th of the 159 countries surveyed in 2005 (CIA World Fact Book, 2009; Oshewolo, 2010b). Using selected world development indicators, the life expectancy at birth in 2006 for male and female in Nigeria was 46 and 47 years respectively. Between 2000 and 2007, 27.2 percent of children under five were malnourished. This is alarming compared to the figure of 3.7 percent between the same periods in Brazil, another emerging economy. Worse still, the mortality rate for children under five is given as 191 per 1000 births in 2006. This is unacceptably high compared to the figures of 69 per 1000 births in South Africa, 108 per 1000 births in Togo and 120 per 1000 births in Ghana (see World Bank, 2008; Oshewolo, 2010b).

7. Conclusion

The activities of ethnic militias in Nigeria have assumed a dangerous dimension due to the advancement in science and technology. All efforts by security agencies to curtail the excesses of ethnic militias have yielded little or no results due to lack of intelligence gathering as obtainable in western societies. Government is daily confronted with frightening cases of indiscriminate killing of innocent citizens in trouble prone areas such as Maduguri, Yobe, Adamawa, Jos, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos and the Niger Delta regions where there are rampant cases of kidnapping, hostage taking, oil bunkering, bombing and armed robbery with impunity. In response to the activities of Boko Haram in North Eastern part of Nigeria, the Federal government under the administration President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa States but the security agencies are still battling to restore normalcy to the trouble states. On the contrary, scores of innocent citizens are sent to their early graves on daily bases by terrorists with reckless abandonment. Therefore, government has no option than to deploy all available resources towards the protection of lives and properties of Nigerian citizens. By implications, funds originally meant for the provision of social amenities and physical infrastructures were eventually channeled to the Defence Ministry. This scenario has impacted negatively on the socio-economic development of Nigeria as a nation. On the whole, the activities of ethnic militias have encouraged hooliganism, joblessness, street hawking, gangsterism, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, widespread poverty, militarism, youth restfulness, social unrest and terrorism. The implication is that the monies government would have used to pursue national economic development are now being used to fund security agencies to curb the excesses of militia activities. We therefore conclude that it is pretty difficult to manage the activities of militia nationalities in Nigeria even though the security agencies are working hard to restore law and order in the troubled states. Consequently, socio-economic activities is hardly achievable in these operational militia states and Nigeria at large.

8. Recommendations

The paper made the following Recommendations:

1. Emphasis should be laid on intelligence gathering in place of the tactics of “*fire for fire*” syndrome. For this purpose, the use of participant observation by security operatives with the terrorist and other ethnic militias is recommended
2. Government should make conscious and deliberate efforts toward the provision of gainful employment to the teeming Nigerian Youth since an “*idle hand is the devils workshop*”. No one who is gainfully employed would allow him or herself to be used as miscreants and rogues.
3. Mass misgivings over perceived political marginalization, poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructure and state welfare programmes as well as the perceived inefficient and corrupt state security system. He therefore notes that an effusion of rising expectations that have generally remained unsatisfied accompanied the advent of the present democratic dispensation. Therefore, government should adopt the option of dialogue in place of “fire brigade” approach.

4. Government should put in place an appropriate institutional structure for curtailing the activities of ethnic militias. Such bodies will be charged with the responsibilities of formulation and implementing policies towards the enhancement of peaceful co-existence of every community in each state of the federation. Community leaders (of both “settlers” and “natives”), religious leaders, traditional rulers, CBOs, NGOs and ethnic militias should be directly involved in the institutional mechanism.
5. The print media and mass media can be used for public enlightenment and attitude reorientation. Also, workshops and seminars can be organized to sensitize people of each community about the social and political objectives of government with the aim of discouraging gangsterism, hooliganisms, youth restiveness.

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