PRIMORDIAL IDENTITIES AND ETHNIC MILITIA: IMPLICATIONS ON SECURITY AND THE FUTURE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract
Communities in Nigeria have been witnessing violence, phenomenal rate of unemployment, kidnapping, raping, militancy, terrorism, insecurity and inequality. Ethnic militias were ostensibly formed to influence the structure of power in the country, and attract attention to the deteriorating material condition, deprivation and perceived marginalisation, while promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their regions through whatever workable means. However, the deadly approaches adopted by the militias in recent times, negate germane agitations, thus, provoking a paper of this magnitude. The schemas of the Enemy system theory offer sufficient insights for elucidation, and it was found that the rate of ethnic cleavages has reached a crescendo to the detriment of nation building. Based on this, dialogue, eradication of stereotypes and prejudices, aggressive development of all regions, re-socialisation, among others, are recommended.

INTRODUCTION
Ethnic and religious tensions within countries as well as new regional conflicts over such natural resources as land, water, crude oil, and tropical forests brought into existence militiamen and their cohorts. Conflict has been directed towards the control of resources. The weakness of state structures and institutions in many countries has heightened the challenges and risks of nation building (Lake & Rothchild, 1998). The internal conflicts are made more complex and lethal by modern technology and communications, and in particular, by the proliferation of destructive weapons which find their way into the hands of youths among others. Many of these events occur in poor societies, and societies where there is a single valuable commodity like oil, which rapidly becomes the fuel that sustains a full-time crisis (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). In these places, the state’s control over arms and ammunition as the means of violence is lost, and violence becomes a way of life with catastrophic consequences for civilian population caught in the crossfire (Stremlau 1989 in Huttington, 1996).

In Nigeria, primordial identities of ethnic, communal and religious formations have taken the centre stage in social and political interactions (Noli, 1978; Suberu, 2001: Nolte, 2004). So much so that ethnic socio-political organisations such as the Afenifere, Ohaneze, and Arewa have acquired substantial influence and positions in the nation’s political configuration. Indeed, these groups have penetrating networks and profound influence in political parties and decisions. The corollary to these groups, especially at the youth level, is the ethnic militias. Yet, the agenda and activities of both groups, that is, the ethnic militias and the pan-ethnic socio-political organisations are not necessarily related. The ethnic militias as observed by Ekine, (2001) and Adams (2003) include, the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Niger Delta Volunteer Force, the Chicoco Movement, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Ijaw Youths, other religious militia groups in Northern Nigeria and lately, Boko Haram. These groups claim to represent specific ethnic or communal interests, and adopt various tactics including violence in the conduct of their activities (Adejumobi, 2002, Akinyede, 2001).

This unhappy trend of contemporary conflict has been the increased vulnerability of civilians to the activities of the militias, while efforts to suppress armed groups have in too many cases led to excessive
and disproportionate actions by governments, producing in some cases excessive and unwarranted suffering on the part of civilian populations. A case in point is the Jesse Town killings, Udi massacre in 1999 (Human Rights Watch, 2005), kidnapping of over two hundred school girls in Chibok by boko haram sect, and suicide bombing of various cities and towns including Independence Day bomb blasts. Since the monster created by error of omission or commission is gradually outgrowing the creator, such that the effects of recent activities of ethnic militia have transcended far beyond regional issues to national and even international platform, wreaking great havoc in its trail, the question is how would Nigeria curtail this monster so that peace, unity, progress, development and security of lives and property are achieved? To delve into some of these issues is where the focus of the discourse is located.

ETHNIC MILITIAS IN NIGERIA

The recent upsurge in hostage taking has given most Nigerians and the international communities cause for concern. The attendant consequences of violence recorded in the last few years in various regions of the country have all continued to pose serious problems to the governments and the citizenry on how best to foster peace and secure lives and property in the regions (Adejumbi, 2000). The rise and growth of ethnic militia groups in contemporary Nigeria could be associated with the internal contradictions of the Nigerian political economy (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

Madunagu (2000) noted that ethnic militia groups emerged in Nigeria in the 1990s when Nigeria was under the military rule. The style and policy of those in power heightened the contradictions of the Nigerian nation and gave rise to ethnic militia groups as one of the consequences of the military administration. According to the author, the concentration of power in the hands of an individual in power, whether in a military or civil regime, has a potential of encouraging ethnic tension in the society, making such individuals to construct an “ethnic state access map” through which they distribute social goods and scarce resources and create polarization and division amongst ethnic groups in order to perpetuate their rule (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). This precarious situation was first observed during the military. It was during the military administrations that inter-ethnic, religious and communal conflicts became unprecedented from the North to the South, communities and religious groups, which had hitherto lived together in harmony had to take up arms against each other (Horowitz, 1985).

Again, the military regimes were extremely repressive, and sought to annihilate those groups and individuals that opposed them. Many civil society groups became victim; these include the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Human Rights and pro-democracy movements. The implication was that many people reclined into their ethnic groups to seek refuge from the onslaught unleashed on most civil society groups, while few others went underground to conduct their activities (Guichoaua, 2005).

Furthermore, the rise of ethnic militia groups under the military regimes was the issue of marginalisation and social deprivation that became rampant in the country. The politics of the control of oil revenue played a key role in the country (Maier, 2002). While oil, which constitutes the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, is sourced from the Niger Delta, the communities live in abject poverty and lacked basic social amenities such as feeder roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, and cottage industries. The general perception in the area was that their marginalisation was associated with their minority status in the Nigerian federation such that the dominant ethnic groups utilised the resources accruing from the oil producing areas to develop their own areas. The fact that oil producing communities suffered from serious ecological and environmental damage in the form of water and air pollution, destruction of aquatic life, and land degeneration suggest that the people of the area are confronted with enormous dangers (Ekine, 2001; Obi, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 1999, and Osaghae, 1995).

The nature and polity of the Nigerian state, the failure of political leadership and public institutions, the structure of power and economic relations amongst groups and the interplay of militarism were some of the factors that provided the background for the emergence of ethnic militia groups (Lokechukwu, 2000). These factors prompted cries of social injustice, marginalization, neglect, deprivation and seeming insecurity for the people. However, the specific conjuncture for the rise of each of these groups differs. For example, while the militia groups in the Niger Delta on the one hand emerged on account of the peculiar problems in the Niger Delta, which include environmental degradation and political insensitivity of the
state (Ekine, 2001). On the other hand, the OPC emerged as a consequence of the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election purported to have been won by late Moshood Abiola (Mazrui, 1999; Adams, 2003). The perception from the Yoruba ethnic group of the annulment was that it was an ethnic issue of the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy to perpetually control political power in the country and to regard people from other parts of the country as "second class" citizens. Further persecution of few Yoruba elites after the annulment by the Abacha regime reinforced the conviction of the Yoruba ethnic group that the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy was out to 'exterminate' them. They then resolved to resist such attempt through every available means including formation of underground organisations and possibly an insurgency (Madunagu, 2000). As if this was not enough trouble, the boko haram emanated around 2009 with a view that western education is evil because those leaders who went through it have become insensitive and self-aggrandizement to the detriment of other members of the society. The group sees those sympathetic to their ideology as allies, while the state and civilian population and organisations who raise alarm against their operations are tagged "enemies". To establish the nexus between perception, mindset, attitude, the real motive of the insurgents and, the destructions, lost of lives and property unleashed by them, adequate explanation must be disposed within an appropriate theory.

The Enemy system theory (EST) was developed in the late 1980s by a group of psychiatrists and international relations practitioners (including Volkan (1988), Montville (1990) and Mack (1990)) to help explain intractable conflict. It is a fusion of developmental psychology and international relations theory. This theory presents some important conceptualisations which help to create a sophisticated explanatory model of conflict. It has been used to explain terrorism. The Enemy system theorists offer explanation on the complexities of group behaviour, particularly with regard to antagonistic group relationships. The position of the Enemy system theory is that humans have a deep rooted psychological need to dichotomise and to establish enemies and allies. This phenomenon happens at individual and group levels. This is an unconscious need which feeds conscious relationships, especially in group lives. This is especially important with regard to the formation of ethnic or national group identities and behaviour.

Identification with these ethnic or national groups largely determines the pattern of people’s relationship within the in-groups (militia) and with those of out-groups. How the masses within each group perceive themselves and their relationships with groups that they are associated with helps to determine whether their relationship will be based on cooperation, competition, or conflict. This is also determined by historic relations between these groups. Consequently, the theory combines concepts from individual and group psychology. Thus, the theory is predicated on the relationships between intrapersonal concerns, the individual within their environment, as well as the interaction of individuals within groups and the actions between those groups. According to the enemy system theorists, humans identify themselves as individuals and as members of groups of individuals. These groups can be acquired at birth, such as race, or through association within society, such as a group of workers or athletes or militiamen. The importance of this is that people also tend to attach ‘good’ qualities with what they identify as theirs, and they tend to associate ‘bad’ qualities with those of the out-groups. Consequently, they begin to develop a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Not only do people distinguish between these groups, but ‘we’ are perceived as good, virtuous, superior and desirable, whereas ‘they’ are perceived as bad, inferior, full of vice and undesirable. As people grow older and become socialised, their identity expands to include their families, the communities, ethnic and national groups. These are the subconscious building blocks of prejudice and discrimination which marks off the emergence of militia groups in the Nigeria.

There is an associated concept of the negative identity. This is when individuals suffer from low self-esteem through narcissistic injuries. Instead of projecting negative images out, these images are saved for the self. This often results in those who suffer from negative identity turning to maladaptive groups such as criminal and militia group to try to regain their lost self-esteem. Indeed, people at risk for such negative identities are usually found among the chronically unemployed and those with little or no educational qualifications. This explains why boko haram members cannot specify their wants or causes of their actions, but are just out to truncate any programme concerning education with the notion that western education is evil.

The enemy system theorists offer a sophisticated theory of conflict which explains difficult problems such as terrorism and the depth of ethnic conflict. The theory transcends the realist paradigm in international relations theory by using communal or ethno-national groups as an important unit of analysis.
ETHNIC CONFLICTS
Even though there is no universal agreement over the precise causes of conflict; it is a straight forward matter to differentiate between underlying and precipitating causes of armed conflict. There is a growing and widespread recognition that armed conflicts cannot be understood without reference to such causes as poverty, political repression, and uneven distribution of resources. Anan (2005) in his report noted that the recognition of causes of conflicts “is a step toward conflict prevention, and preventive strategies must therefore work to promote human rights, to protect minority rights and to institute political arrangements in which all groups are represented”, ignoring these underlying factors amounts to addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of deadly conflict.

Conflict prevention measures, like other forms of assistance, are always best implemented when they are based on detailed knowledge and understanding, and maximum cooperation between helpers and those to be helped. In analyzing the causes of conflict and applying preventive measures, it is important that developed countries be aware of the cultural barriers that may inhibit the interpretation of information coming from other countries and regions, and that they overcome any reluctance to examine closely their own policies for evidence of their potential negative impact on developing countries (Osaghae, 1986).

ETHNIC MILITIA AND NATIONAL SECURITY
National Security is the totality of policies and actions initiated and taken to protect the nation-state from both internal and external threats. It can also be defined as any or all actions taken to protect and enhance the national interest of a state. To ensure national security, it is not merely enough to have the police and armed forces provide security. The concept is expansive and also includes the necessity for good governance, a government based on the will of the people, a competent leadership, a caring government that provides for the common good, a constitutional and legal system that treats everyone equally, and a government that is transparent and accountable. Anything short of the totality of good governance minimizes the meaning of national security. The reason for this is that a dissatisfied population would most likely refuse to cooperate in making the state governable, regardless of the security forces deployed against it (Momoh, 2002). Unfortunately, in Nigeria and in most states in Africa, the leaders do not seem to realize the importance of good governance and transparency. As a result, they tend to define national security very narrowly and focus entirely on the security aspect to the exclusion of other critical elements. In Nigeria, the meaning of the term is further reduced to a level where it is only applied against those who oppose government policies while those in government whose actions are inimical to the national interests are allowed to continue their destructive path since they are in government (Suberu & Larry, 2003). Regrettably, the actions and inactions of many of these groups have continuously abated meaningful development as development cannot take place in an atmosphere of recurring rancour.

ETHNIC MILITIAS AND THE FUTURE OF NIGERIA
Frustrated and traumatised by repeated failure of leadership in the country, Nigerians are increasingly arming and militarising themselves through ethnic militias. The militias are growing in number, as well as in the possession and use of military weaponry. They have become so sophisticated that challenging the military forces is not an issue. Indeed, while the militias are gaining in strength, the Army and the Police Forces are depleting for being overexploited by the political elite. The militiamen are able to succeed because security apparatus of government become vulnerable and are easily compromised, while some have become accomplices as depicted by recent arrest of defected military officer, immigration officer, among others. In such a scenario, it is quite possible that many soldiers and police officers would actually join the ethnic militias to fight against the government thereby, posing unfathomable security challenges like the inability to rescue kidnapped Chibok girls after six weeks in captivity. MASSOB and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force have clearly demonstrated where the allegiance of many Igbo and Ijaw youths lie. There is no doubt that a substantial number of Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani youths also have an affinity for the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) and the Boko Haram than Nigeria. Evidently, if these ethnic forces square up their differences, they can inflict harm to the Army and the Police more than what is currently unleashed by boko haram. Thus, if the political leaders are truly interested in the national security of the country, they should listen to the Nigerian people and not assume that they can always rely on the Army and the Police to do their dirty work for them (Sesay, Ukeje & Odebiyi, 2003). In fact, the ethnic militias can easily recreate Nigeria, either for better or for worse.
CONCLUSION
The paper was undertaken to address problems associated with ethnic militia and security of lives and property in Nigeria. Problems identified include increasing cases of hostage-taking, terrorism, agitation for resource control, militancy action and retaliation as emanating from lack of basic infrastructure, systemic contradictions and phenomenal increase in the rate of unemployed persons in the country.
Findings of the paper are imperative to the conclusion that the emergence of ethnic militias in various regions of Nigeria has serious implications on security and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Nigeria as a developing country is faced with constantly evolving development challenges resulting from inappropriate management of the resources and the environment. The situation becomes appalling with increased ecological pollution, degradation, displacement of communities, widespread poverty, poor state of infrastructure and unemployment and insecurity of lives and property. These problems brew discontent, frustration and obvious expressions of the dysfunctional structure of the Nigerian federation as manifested in the emergence of ethnic militias.

Since this situation has become a national problem, concerted effort from all and sundry should be undertaken in order to ameliorate the level of violence perpetuated by militiamen in various regions and thereby speeding up the process of transformation.
Resocialisation process is needful where parents would have to instil values and acceptable precepts of the society in their children.
Stereotypes and prejudices that becloud intergroup relations in Nigeria must be redefined so that cleavages to ethnic nationality at the expense of patriotism would be thrown away.

Federal Government of Nigeria should institute development policies which should be gender and youth sensitive in the provision of adequate educational facilities, training and creation of job opportunities. State and local governments, community and opinion leaders in the country should demonstrate more concern with reference to the problems of development of the environment by encouraging accountable and transparent fund management in all project initiations and executions.

Government at all levels should encourage peaceful approach to dialogue where all outstanding matters in the regions would be discussed with representatives of all stakeholders in attendance. The forum for this dialogue should be devoid of the usual method where “a group of stakeholders” are hired to participate in the name of community leaders.

REFERENCES


