

AFRICAN RELIGION, STATE FRAGILITY AND ETHNIC MILITIAS IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EGBESU AND OMBATSE BOYS

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Abstract

In the last four decades, there has been an increased incidence across the globe of the emergence and activities of militia groups. Admittedly, the magnitude of this violence is staggering and Africa is by far the continent most affected by collective violence. One of the most salient characteristics of ethnic militias is the use of religion in the recruitment and initiation of members, as well as a means of sustaining their activities. In Nigeria, religion has provided a parallel for motivating and sustaining the activities of ethnic militias and has also become a dominant variable propelling act of resistance that most times snowballs into violent conflict when not properly managed. Thus, while other scholars may perceive the invocation of ancestral spirits as symbolized by the Egbesu and Azhilli deity of the Ijaw and Eggon ethnic group as representing the normative pattern and religious beliefs of the people, their crucial role in emboldening, empowering and engendering the struggle is believed to be facilitated by their marginalization within the Nigerian federal system. This paper therefore contends that, the asymmetric power between the Nigerian state and these militias may have privileged the invocation of the supernatural as a critical agency of strength and courage.

Introduction

Religion is one phenomenon that has aroused a wide range of attention in the last four decades. Its significance in any attempt to understand African life cannot be overemphasized¹ In fact more than anything else, it is what shape our understanding of the universe and makes life a profoundly religious phenomenon.² As Girard posits; “religion is that obscurity which surrounds man's effort to defend himself by curative or preventive means against his own violence.”³ In a similar vein, Katsfelt argues that established religious traditions are applied to new social conditions resulting in innovations being created on the basis of existing traditions”.⁴

In Nigeria, the historical and religious roots of resistance demonstrate that, the youths are more than a "juvenile underworld" motivated by much more than a post-colonial "Petriolic Ambition" or "Politics of the Belly" where the state controls the elite, the private and the public sector.⁵ In this context, the state is not only the highest expression of reason/violence but it is also the highest producer of reason/violence⁶ The Nigerian state is a classic example of a paradoxical entity for being “powerful but weak”, “repressive but feeble”, “expansive but collapsing”, “absolutist but fragile”.⁷ The emergence of ethnic militias can be traced to the misgivings over perceived political and socio-economic marginalization, high level of poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructures and state welfare programmes as well as an inefficient and corrupt state system.⁸ Hence, feeling so frustrated and endangered, ethnic militias reinvent and tap into the spiritual powers of the ancient deities in their homeland, a magical device that complements their limited firepower⁹ In fact, there is a direct co-relation between peoples access to state's power and the political significance of religion: the more access to state power, the less political significance of religion and viceversa.¹⁰

Frantz Fanon's prognosis that African struggles for colonial liberation would “pour scorn” on ancestral worship did not come to pass in Nigeria. On the contrary, ancestral worship is motivated by a modality of defiance where ancient deities protect adherents from threats to life and the environment as well as provide an alternative trajectory of honour, dignity and a sense of belonging where the state failed.¹¹ Thus, while other scholars may perceive the invocation of ancestral spirits as symbolized by the *Egbesu* and *Azhilli* deity of the Ijaw and Eggon ethnic

group as representing the normative pattern and religious beliefs of the people, it's crucial role in emboldening, empowering and engendering the struggle is believed to be facilitated by their marginalization within the Nigerian federal system.¹²

Historical overview of ethnic militias in Nigeria

The historical roots of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be traced to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British colonial administration of Lord Frederick Lugard. This brought about the unification of culturally and historically diverse ethnic groups, some of which had been rivals and over-lapping imperialists in the pre-colonial times¹³The amalgamation was therefore, a mere marriage of convenience that is; it was intended to suit the sole purpose of the ease of administration and exploitation by the colonial powers¹⁴and was "a unity by a rope of sand".¹⁵ This was a as result of the fact that, it compelled the diverse ethnic groups of Northern and Southern Protectorates into a single entity without their consultation. Thus, British colonialism laid the cradle of ethnic acrimony in the present day Nigerian state.¹⁶

The emergence and growth of ethnic militia groups in contemporary Nigeria can be traced to the internal contradiction inherent in the Nigerian Political Economy in the 1990s when the Nigerian state was in distress of a callous military dictatorship, particularly during the Babangida and Abacha regimes.¹⁷ Consequently, the Nigerian state became a 'hotbed' for the upspring of ethnic militia groups. It is worthwhile to note that, the various ethnic militias have different histories and goals. Their objectives range from drawing attention to the perceived marginalization of their ethnic group; serving as social pressure to influence the structure of power to redress perceptions of marginalization of their group or the extreme goal of outright disintegration from the Nigerian state.¹⁸For the Niger Delta people, it is exploitation and environmental degradation; for the Igbos it is marginalization; for the Hausa-Fulani, it is uneven development; for the Minorities in the North, particularly the Middle Belt it is one of internal colonialism; for the Yorubas, it is power exclusion.¹⁹

The O'odua People's Congress (OPC) was formed in 1994 in the wake of the crises following the cancellation of the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections.²⁰ At the beginning, the OPC aimed at working towards the unity, progress and autonomy of all descendants of Oduduwa (Yoruba)

but in 1999, the OPC changed its major objectives from seeking self-determination for Yoruba people to crime fighting activities and settlement of personal disputes. This change in focus enlisted the OPC among the other militia groups in the country known for violence and crime.²¹

The Arewa peoples' congress (APC) was officially launched on December 13, 1999 as a counter weight to the OPC. The launch of the APC coincided with the militarization of OPC and the riots between Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani in Saguma and Ketu. Its formation was a manifestation of elite discontent against the new regime as the elite had lost the power they previously enjoyed.²²

The Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafran (MASSOB) founded in 1999 is an Igbo dominated ethnic movement. Since the end of the civil war in 1970, Igbos feel completely alienated from the Nigerian state. marginalization entails –the apparent deliberate exclusion of any particular group(s) by other similar group or groups from either having access to and or taking due possession of common key positions and common resources as manifested in the political, economic, military, educational, media and bureaucratic realms. This is the feelings of people in Igbo society hence the quest for an Igbo state MASSOB is the body that was established to actualize this objective.²³

In the Niger-Delta, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) founded in 1990's, sparked the formation of loose armed groups that are based in that region such as the Niger-Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND). These organizations are not only struggling to call attention to the plundering of the environment of the delta due to oil exploration, but also demanding that a good proportion of the resources exploited from their region be retained there so as to right the wrong years of deprivation.²⁴ Egbesu Boys which is the military wing of the Ijaw youth Council and others are the armed militias in the Niger Delta that regarded themselves as capable of assuming the responsibilities of the armed forces and providing the needed security for the oil multinationals in particular and the region in general.²⁵

The Bakassi Boys found in Southeast 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. Its emergence in 1999

was the direct consequence of the prevalence of armed robbery in major markets in Southeast Nigeria by people who were nicknamed 'mafia'.²⁶ Recently, there has been the emergence and activities of ethnic militias as it relates to challenging state control over the control of the instrument of coercion. This is evidenced in the spate of violence witnessed in the North Central zone. For example, this is obvious with the Ombatse phenomenon in Nasarawa State.²⁷

The emergence of Egbesu and Ombatse ethnic militias

a. Egbesu Boys

The *Egbesu* Boys is the militia group of the dominant Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta and the Ijaw youth council coordinates its activities. Hence, the *Egbesu* Boys is the military arm of the IYC in the struggle for equality and justice.²⁸ They came into national lime light in 1998 when the youthful and progressive IYC took the lead in mobilizing Ijaw nationalism which resulted in the Kaiama declaration on 11 Dec.1998.²⁹ It is pertinent to note that the *Egbesu* militia is not a close - knit organization but a coalition of Ijaw ethnic militias.³⁰

The social status of the *Egbesu* militia is that of a male membership, many of whom are school dropouts and poorly educated, often from the low socio-economic class. Membership tends to be related to the depth of feelings about the alleged neglect, marginalization, injustice and underdevelopment against the Ijaws. It is also product of ethnic mobilization as some have taken the oath of membership due to ethnic patriotism and solidarity.³¹ Its quasi-organizational structure has at its head- the President and the secretary-general, who coordinates the movement's affairs on a daily basis and during crisis. Even if the *Egbesu* boys have a clear leadership, little is known about its internal dynamics as its activities are shrouded in constructed mythology and secrecy.³² This militia group is led by one Alex Preye and has its presence in many cities in the country where there are concentrations of Ijaws including Lagos.³³ Adherents usually undergo initiation rituals which bestows upon them, the powers of the *Egbesu* deity. The initiation process involves being etched with scars on some hidden parts of the body.³⁴ It also involves the sprinkling of sacred water on to the warriors where upon the spirit is invoked.³⁵

The activities of the *Egbesu* Boys comprise; kidnapping of foreign oil workers for ransom, sabotaging oil installations and attacking security

agents. Since its emergence, they have engaged the federal government and multinational oil companies in violent exchanges. This was the situation before the federal government deployed troops to erase Odi from the face of the earth in 1999-when members of the Egbesu militia allegedly killed twelve policemen on November 8 1999.³⁶

However, based on their resolve, the *Egbesu* Boys have continued to fight to attain regional autonomy from the unjust and inequitable Nigerian federation and persistent efforts by the government to crush them have proved abortive as they operate within the difficult terrain of multi-channeled creeks and swamps along the Niger Delta.³⁷ They use essentially speed boats and guerilla tactics when attacking oil and military installations. The Egbesu Boys aroused a wide range of attention when they engaged the Oduua people's congress (OPC) in a fierce combat in Ajegunle, a suburb of Lagos, after the OPC purportedly killed some Ijaw youths suspected to be armed robbers. The fact that they were able to do this in Lagos, which is a Yoruba land is significant on its own and tells much about this group.³⁸

Following attacks by the Boko- Haram Islamic sect, a militia faction of the Egbesu Boys christened "the Egbesu Mightier Fraternity of Izon land in a press statement on October 2011, jointly signed by their leaders - Commander OkikiKene, OkinSele, Korumah and Abu Mic on behalf of the group stated that:

Note well, if further killings by Boko-Haram as a result of Goodluck Jonathan's presidency in the country within fourteen days of this statement, we shall without hesitation commence sending every Muslim in the Niger Delta to their various homes and ask our people to return home ...if they don't want peace, we will meet them wherever they are .This is our message. We have killed and will not care to kill again.³⁹

At the expiration of the 14-day ultimatum, the Egbesu Mightier Fraternity claimed responsibility for the explosion in an Arabic and Quaranic school in Sapele, Delta state, which had seven people injured on 28 Dec. 2011. The Ijaw militant group affirmed that, the incident was a reaction to the continued Boko Haram killings in the North.⁴⁰

It is pertinent to note that a new militia faction of the Egbesu Boys named 'the Red Egbesu Water Lions' has recently emerged in the Niger Delta. In a press statement by the leaders of the group- General Tony Alagbakeriwei and Commander Ebi Abakoromor, the reformed Egbesumillitia stated that for peace to hold way, seven demands must be met by the Nigerian government.⁴¹

Prominent Amongst these demands include;

- The commencement of academic activities at the maritime university, Okerenkoko, Delta state.
- The restructuring of the amnesty programme with an upward review of funding to accommodate more beneficiaries.
- The sacking of the coordinator of the amnesty programme and special adviser to the president on Niger delta -Brig-Gen. Paul Boroh (retd.)
- The increase in derivation to 50 percent and the payment of 50 percent directly to the communities through appropriate structures.⁴²
- The release of all persons currently in detention facilities.
- The creation of a Niger delta investment and developmental bank.
- The reservation of pipeline surveillance contracts for the current agitating youths.
- The creation of 6000jobs slots by the oil majors and related agencies such as NNPC, PTDF, NPDC and NSPIMS.⁴³

In concluding, the group re-affirmed the Ijaw's position of true federalism within a restructured state and that the government should activate the necessary platform. In the words of the reformed group;

"We warn the federal government to be sincere and committed to the peace process and any deviation would lead to the resumption of hostilities".⁴⁴

b. Ombatse Boys

Ombatse is themilitia group of the Eggon ethnic group in Nassarawa State, North-CentralNigeria.⁴⁵ The Eggons are present in at least six of the thirteen local government areas in Nasarawa state. They are also found in the lower fringes of Kaduna state as well as the federal capital territory.⁴⁶It is estimated that the Eggons are about 750,000 in population.⁴⁷Although, they have not expressed a separatist agenda either from Nigeria or Nasarawa state, they are nevertheless driven by an acute sense of political marginalization.⁴⁸

Originally formed to fight social vices, the Ombatse has over the years metamorphosed into a formidable socio-cultural flagship dedicated to the protection of the land, people and heritage of the Eggon ethnic group as well as their common aspiration⁴⁹. Ombatse was allegedly formed as a result of a revelation received in a dream that called for male Eggons to purify the society and get rid of social vices such as promiscuity, adultery, crime, alcohol consumption and smoking.⁵⁰ This group is led by the Chief Priest-Lega Ahgu popularly known as Baba Alakyo who hails from lakio village in Nassarawa state, North-Central Nigeria. The Chief Priest is assisted by a number of other officials namely the spiritual leader, the chairman, the secretary, the Public Relations Officer (PRO), the Discipline Officer (DO), the Legal Officer, the Welfare Officer, and the Patron. The group's founders have been identified as; Haruna Musa ZicoKigbu, Zabura Musa Akwanshiki, Sgt. Alaku Ehe, Shuaibu Alkali, Iliyasu Hassan Gyabo and Abdullahi Usman.⁵¹ The Ombatse also maintains a rank and file of youth vanguard who often act as its 'foot soldiers'. This crop of enthusiastic youths have been variously implicated in the spate of inter-ethnic skirmishes and communal violence in Nasarawa State over the recent years⁵²

The Ombatse spokesman, Zachary Zamani Allumaga, explained the purpose of the movement thus:

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.⁵³

The motto of this ethnic militia group is captured in its sloganeering format: "*Ombatse*", "*Ombolamu*". An Eggon word meaning "time has come" or "it is time now".⁵⁴ This mantra also draws a foreboding parallel to *Umkhontowe Sizwe*, (Spear of the Nation) that was used by Black South Africans in the struggles against the Apartheid regime. *Umkhontowe Sizwe* had started its armed struggle, with a warning that, 'the time comes in the life of any nation when there are left with only two choices that is; submit or fight.'⁵⁵ The Ombatse militia group is perceived as an alternative to the failed social justice and security in Nigeria. In a press statement, Chris Mamman- the president of the Eggon Cultural Development Association

affirmed that:

In recent times about 259 Eggon tribesmen men had been killed, over 2500 houses burnt and the government never bothered to send-in a single police personnel to protect them right from the former governor-Abdullahi Adamu in 1999 till date.⁵⁶

Prior to 2011, the activities of the Ombatse were more or less localized and scarcely prominent in the Nigerian public domain. The 2011 general electioneering marked a milestone in the evolution of the Ombatse Boys. In this context the Governor of Nasarawa State, Umaru Tanko Al-Makura was said to have benefited from the politico-partisan patronage of the Ombatse in making good his electoral victory, based on a certain sinister agreement.⁵⁷ On May 7 2013, the Ombatse Boys came into national limelight when a contingent of Nigeria's security forces detailed to arrest the high-priest of the Ombatse cult was ambushed by the group. It was reported that the Ombatse murdered 74 security personnels of the Nigerian police and the SSS.⁵⁸

The Ombatse draws followership from Eggon male adults of all faith. In effect, its members include Moslems, Christians, atheists, traditional worshipers and polytheists alike. Recruitment and initiation into the organization are largely based on persuasion, even though some people claim that such has often involved elements of subtle cajole and force.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, not all Eggon indigenes identify with the Ombatse. As a matter of fact, some of them take strong exceptions to being associated with anything that has to do with the group based either on personal values and convictions or religious biases.⁶⁰

A comparative study of the Egbesu and Ombatse ethnic militias

It is therefore not only true that for Africa in general, change especially abrupt transition is mediated through that aspect of culture known as religion but also, faith based loyalties have an unchallenged ability to mobilize energies and tap into human, spiritual and material resources.⁶¹ One of the salient characteristics of ethnic militia groups in Nigeria is the use of religion in the recruitment and initiation of members and as a means of sustaining their activities.⁶² As Francis posits, there is a link between the activities and modus operandi of militias and the belief in supernatural powers and occult practices;⁶³ The hallmark and driving force for their putative efficacy, is the claim to supernatural powers through the use of oracular deities and secret societies and also their

claims of ‘invincibility’ or being ‘inoculated’ against bullets and light weapons.⁶⁴

Ritual ceremonies also occupy a central place in its tenets and new members are initiated through rituals that are inspired by African traditional religion. The oath taking rituals, and acts of traditional worship that symbolize a return to African culture, are actually not only forms of expression of dissent but also provide an ideological and structural platform for mobilization and legitimization.⁶⁵ Thus, it may be this nature of thinking that has made Egbesu and Azhili, the rallying point of strength and courage by the Egbesu and Ombatse militia group. It is worthwhile to note that, the recourse to the *Egbesu* and *Azhili* deities does not just entail the deployment of an ancient reliable deity to war but also serves more crucially as a rallying point of cultural solidarity as well as a representation of an ideal environment devoid of socio-economic marginalization and exploitation by a formal state structure.⁶⁶ Hence, the ritual control of war and reciprocal violence exerted by *Egbesu* and *Azhili*, confirms Girald’s theory that religion’s sole purpose was to prevent such reciprocal violence.⁶⁷

For the Egbesu Boys, the totems of Ijaw spirituality are considered a very important tool in the war against the federal government and the TNOCS.⁶⁸ Members of this group worship the Egbesu deity. *Egbesu* is generally considered a masculine deity whose spirit is manifested in war, peace, justice, power and protection in Ijaw cosmology. *Egbesu* is also called other names in Ijaw language, such as *Agadagba-Oru*, *Dirimo-Oru* or *Dirimo-asain*, amongst others.⁶⁹ According to the Ijaw mythical history, they are the lost tribe of Israel and Egbesu is the protective god, which led them on their exodus from Israel to the west coast of Africa thousands of years ago.⁷⁰ Still others trace the belief in Egbesu, the angel of god to the Ancient Greek city of Annu or Onnu (Heliopolis to the ancient Greek) which roots Ijaw spiritual culture in ancient concepts such as the tree of life, spiritual initiation, reincarnation and deification of ancestors.⁷¹

The *Egbesu* deity can be found in all of the 64 Ijaw speaking communities and clans from Arogbo-Appoi in ondo state to the territories and boundaries of the Ijaws in Eastern Ibeno in Akwa- Ibom and in the core south of Nigeria. The seat of power of the *Egbesu* deity is the shrine at Amabolou in Ekeremor local government area of Bayelsa state.⁷² *Egbesu* is often worshipped in clandestine, remote shrines and make shift alters

inside temporary riverside militia camps.⁷³ The war spirits has a voracious appetite for both “soft and hot drinks”⁷⁴ and allegiance to *Egbesu* is a largely male-oriented practice.⁷⁵

The revival or revision of such a cultural phenomenon in the context of violence and bloodletting signals an orgiastic desire for a pre-colonial past where resources and their ownership and exploitation were privileged through local idioms, and social practices were reflective of a pan-Ijaw frame of social relations.⁷⁶ A spokesperson for the Supreme *Egbesu* Assembly affirmed that, *Egbesu* is a religious practice of the Ijaws and further explained that *Egbesu* adherents wear a red cloth known as “*Alor*” and a green leaf is also put on the forehead or upper arm and a white vest which makes them impervious to bullets or invincible to their enemies.⁷⁷ *Egbesu* offers spiritual powers and protection from bullets during armed resistance throughout the history of the Ijaws dating back to the pre-colonial times. The belief in the prowess of the deity among the people is best captured in the following assertion:

The *Egbesu* deity has time and time again assisted the Niger Delta fighters to be more or less invincible in the eyes of the federal government. By making sure that these boys who are defending the livelihood of their fatherland do not lose their lives easily, it has aided the Niger Delta struggle. Do you know that when the *Egbesu* deity dwells in you, bullets cannot harm you and also machetes cannot cut through your skin? That is our strength against the heavy arms of the military.⁷⁸

It is a fact of history that during the demonstrations of the early post Kaiama Declaration, the military men deployed to bring tranquility to the region were boldly attacked by barehanded *Egbesu* boys, basking in the supernatural bullet proof euphoria of the *Egbesu* power. A prime example is the killing of many soldiers by youths from Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area in Bayelsa State who sought to liberate Kaiama from military occupation following the all-Ijaw youths conference of December 11 1998.⁷⁹

However, this traditional Ijaw belief exacts severe penalties, including death for any adept that violates the strict codes, conditions and mechanisms.⁸⁰ *Egbesu* possesses young men to win battle, imparting super human abilities and strike them dead for transgressions and the hundreds of dietary, sexual and battle field restrictions binding adherents to *Egbesu's* powers.⁸¹ The potent combination of truth, purity and power

liberates, motivates and captivates the daily lives of Egbesu adepts. This combination is essential for warriors who take uncanny risks in the super structural powers of the Nigerian government. In this manner, adherents are obliged to uphold tenets – It was a matter of life and death. Breaking these precepts invokes dire consequences.⁸²

Akin to the Egbesu militia, the Ombatse phenomenon is symptomatic of a failed or dysfunctional state justice and security system in Nigeria.⁸³ The Ombatse militia is based on a traditional form of worship practiced by the Eggon ethnic group.⁸⁴ They worship a deity known as *Azhili* and also indoctrinate adherents that their principles tallies with the Bible and Quran.⁸⁵ The Azhilideity is often worshiped at the seat of power located in Lakyoas well as other places in the State (Sabon Gida, Bakin Kogi, Angwan Abusa)⁸⁶ Allegiance to the Azhili deity is largely a male-oriented practice and women are barred from entering shrines. According to the Ombatse Chairman-Zico: “

The religion had existed since time immemorial with ‘Azhili’ interceding for the people. Consequently, people linked with the ‘Ombatse Group’ usually ask Azhili for rain, good harvest and many other fortunes.”⁸⁷

The ideas and practices of the *Azhilideity* legitimate and structure the actions its members take. However, it is its claims to a pre-colonial trajectory that rights of ownership over land and resources are defined in opposition to the colonial and subsequent nation-state, and these provide a key context for situating counter-narratives to Eggon political marginalization. The Eggon sense of political marginalization transcends the contemporariness of the current agitation. However, it can be located within the context of the Hausa-Fulani hegemonic politics with Islam constituting the single most important factor in the hegemonic drive.⁸⁸

The *Azhili* deity provided young Eggon men with the Courage and protection to fight when they felt no one or nothing else would assist them. Azhili demands a series of actions from adherents, most of which are centered on purity and pollution. One member of the Ombatse described the fundamentals thus:

The sect is highly purified and its members are not into alcoholism, smoking, promiscuity and stealing. Our members are highly moral and dedicated to their cause only”⁸⁹

These actions prove fighters’ devotion and the reciprocal protections

bestowed on them by *Azhili*. It is pertinent to note that unlike the Egbesu deity that has a great tolerance for alcoholism and smoking, the *Azhili* deity prohibits adherents to engage in such acts. This deity also has no form of moderation unlike the belief of the Christians and Muslims that the punishment of God is on the Day of Judgment.⁹⁰

As part of their initiation rituals, members are fortified with charms and amulets that make them apparently invincible and indestructible by the snares of the enemy.⁹¹ Just like the Egbesu Boys that wear a red cloth for protection, Ombatse members typically wear black clothing and bundles of charms to provide magical protection from gunfire.⁹² It is a fact of history that on November 17, 2013, a group of over 40 personnel of the State Security Service (SSS) invaded an Ombatse prayer ground at Alogani with a view to arrest the worshippers. The SSS were reported to have shot sporadically but their shootings were supposedly rendered ineffectual by the superior diabolical powers of the Ombatse.⁹³

Conclusion

While the occult and fetish rituals might have formed crucial components of warfare in pre-colonial Africa, their return in contemporary times indicates the desire of youth militias to embrace a supposedly superior force in confronting the Nigerian state. The emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria can be traced to the misgivings over perceived political and socio-economic marginalization, high level of poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructures and state welfare programmes as well as an inefficient and corrupt state system. Thus, the militia youths saw that, the socio-economic and political marginalization was brought to Centre stage with the aid of the protective powers of ancient deities in their homeland. To curb the prevalence of ethnic militia conflicts, the Nigerian government needs to:

- a. Build Stakes for Confidence and Trust Building.
- b. Develop concrete sustainable development strategies and programmes to prevent, manage and completely resolve these conflicts.
- c. Initiate effective governance systems /anti-Corruption control measures.
- d. Adopt weapons and border control mechanisms.
- e. Initiate security sector reforms.

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