ETHNIC MILITIAS AND THE NIGERIAN STATE: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to capture the nuances of the interface between ethnic militias and the Nigerian state. Existing knowledge tends to suggest that ethnic militias in Nigeria emerged as a result of struggles for self-determination because of the repressive and oppressive nature of the state. This study argues that aside repressive and oppressive character of the Nigerian state, the state is imposed and does not exist for the interest of other Nigerians particularly the interest of other ethnic groups that do not control the state. The state becomes an instrument for political and economic exclusion for the ethnic groups that constitute the state and controls the enormous resources accruing to it. Ethnic militias as pan- ethnic formations emerged to serve the political and economic interests of their members, their co-ethnics and ethnic homelands. This study posits three interconnected analysis. First, the most glaring paradoxes of the petro-state are the level of poverty in Nigeria with its huge oil resources. Second, in Nigeria, national security contradicts the security of nationals because of politics of oil. And finally; there is a contradiction of security project which the 'militariat' pursues. The paper concludes that unless people-centred initiatives and services are provided, ethnic militias will continue to be on the increase and engage the state in pertinent ways.
Key words: Ethnic Militia, The State, Militariat, OPC, MASSOB, MEND, Hisbah

ETNİK MİLİTER GÜÇLER VE NİJERYA DEVLETİ: GELECEĞE BİR BAKIŞ

Özet

Bu çalışma Nijerya Devleti ve etnik militer gruplar arasındaki kesişme noktalarının nüanslarını irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Halihazırda var olan bilgi Nijerya'daki etnik militer güçlerin devletin baskıcı tutumuna tepki olarak kendi hakkını tayin etme ile ilgili çatışmalardan ortaya çıktığını söylemektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel argümanı Nijerya'nın baskıcı tutumunun ötesinde Nijerya Devleti'nin devletin mekanizmaları içinde yer almayan diğer etnik grupların da çıkarına uygun hareket etmediğidir. Devlet onu oluşturan etnik grupların bir kısmı için bir siyasi ve ekonomi dışlama aracı haline gelerek devletin elindeki muazzam kaynakların dağılımını bu doğrultuda denetlemektedir. Etnikçi yapılar olarak kendi siyasi ve ekonomik çıkarlarını, etnik gruplarını ve etnik yurtlarını korumak amacıyla ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma birbirine bağlantılı üç analizi ortaya koymaktadır. Birincisi, petrol üreticisi ve zengin yeraltı kaynaklarına sahip bir devlet olarak Nijerya'nın fakirlik seviyesinin ciddi bir paradoksu ortaya çıkarması; ikincisi Nijerya'nın milli güvenliğinin vatandaşlarının güvenliği ile petrol siyaseti bağlamında çelişmesi; üçüncüsü ise güvenlik güçlerinin çelişen güvenlik stratejileridir. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın temel önermesi insan ve hizmet odaklı atılımlar gerçekleşmediği müddetçe Nijerya'da etnik militer hareketlerin artacağı ve devlet ile farklı şekillerde ilişki kurmaya çalışacağıdır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Etnik Militer Güçler, Devlet, Militer Güçler, OPC, MASSOB, MEND, Hisbah

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Introduction

Since the early 1990s, ethnic and ethno-religious contestation and conflicts have been on the increase in Nigeria. Furthermore, since the enthronement of democratic government in 1999, ethno-religious politicization and mobilization have also reached fever heat. Prominent among these ethnic militias include many of the Niger Delta militias such as the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and the Chikoko Movement. Other visible militias include the O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB) and the Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC).[1] Although all of them are not ethnic militias such as APC, however, they engage the state in pertinent ways. The number of these militias is growing daily and they are contesting the political, the social and economic positions as part of the process of liberalization of the political environment. These ethnic militias employ force, have preponderance of youth membership, and have ethnic affiliations. In addition, it is a movement of a predominantly popular nature demanding change over the status quo.[2] Their emergence and activities speak volume about the nature and character of the Nigerian post-colonial state.

The state in Africa was an imposition whose interests were at variance with the interests of the African state and peoples, who were, therefore alienated from it. Although the state in Africa is a colonial creation, but it has been re-appropriated by Africans in very significant ways (Bayart, 1991). This state continued with the exclusive nature of colonial rule while military intervention further contributed in insulating the state from the citizenry.[3]

This study is an attempt to capture the nuances of the interface between ethnic militias and the Nigerian state. The objective of this study is to analyze the causes of the emergence of ethnic militias and how the Nigerian state has developed exclusive character that nurtured the emergence of these ethnic militias. This is not to say that existing explanations are incorrect, however, the paper intends to analyze a new framework and proffer explanations for the emergence of ethnic militias and their pertinent engagement with the Nigerian state. The method of data collection and analysis are both secondary and qualitative.

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[1] O. Agbu, *Ethnic Militias and the Threat to Democracy in Post-Transition Nigeria*, Uppsala, Nordiska Africainstitutet, 2004, p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] P. Mutfwang, "The State, Civil Society and Governance in Nigeria: A Post 1960 Synopsis", O.S. Abah (Ed.), *The Geographies of Citizenship in Nigeria*, Zaria, Tamaza Publishing Co. Ltd, 2003, p. 101.

ETHNIC MILITIA: A RE-CONSIDERATION

A militia is an organization of citizens prepared to provide defense, emergency or Para-military service.[4] The legality of such organizations vary from country to country. They play specific economic, political, and military roles which constitute the original ideological foundation. They are formed by collections of like-minded ethnic group members and espouse various causes from economic, political, and social in a country to civil insurrection. The earliest historical record of militia is found in the Old Testament, and in particular the Book of Judges, when the Israelites fought as militia against the threatening neighbouring tribes.[5] There is a long history of militia in different countries across the world. They, however, serve different purposes at different times.

Existing literature tends to suggest that ethnic militias emerged as a result of struggle for self determination because of the repressive and oppressive nature of the Nigerian state under the military regimes. Some argue that its emergence was due to colonialism that created social distance in the urban areas in Nigeria.[6] Olukoshi argues that deep-seated economic crisis on the continent which continued into the 1980s served to undermine state capacity and legitimacy in Africa whilst simultaneously reinforcing the structures of authoritarianism.[7] As the African post-colonial state became weakened people increasingly had to fend for themselves by resorting to primordial sources of identification and assistance. Some sought solace in new and resuscitated or re-invigorated ethnic or religious associations.[8]

Nnoli argues that there is widespread belief that there is a paradoxical relationship between modernization and political disorder.[9] He goes on to state that 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. Consequently, a society in which modernizing leaders rapidly expand education by increasing the number of educated persons without the corresponding increase in levels of economic opportunities will most probably produce some sort of political anomie.[10]

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[4] New World Encyclopedia, www.newworldencyclopedia.org retrieved no 20th December,2011
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978.
[7] A. Olukoshi A, "Economic Crisis, Multipartism and Opposition Politics in Contemporary Africa", Adebayo Olukoshi (Ed.), *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998, p16.

[8] E. Osaghae E (1995). *Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria*, Research Report No. 98, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet
[9] O. Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria,* England, UNRISD and Avebury, 1995.
[10] O. Agbu, Ethnic Militias and the Threat…, p. 14.

As observed by Azar two main factors stand out when discussing the rise of conflict in politically active multi-communal societies.[11] These are the colonial legacy and the historical pattern of rivalry and contest amongst communal actors. The British colonial government showed extreme disenchantment for the ethnic nationalities with the Nigerian state perceived as a contrivance, and the resurgence of ethnic identity politics that we seek to understand the nature of the growing challenge by ethnic militias to the Nigerian state. Ethnic militias arose as a result of certain circumstances in the body politic that the ordinary people on the streets could not tolerate any more.

Ethnic formations are pan-ethnic formations serving or purporting to serve, the political and economic interests of their members, their co-ethnics and ethnic homelands. They could be issue-specific movements pursuing more diffuse and generalized ethnic interests. The political role of ethnic organizations has been well documented by observers of Nigerian politics.[12] By 1920s Southern Nigeria was awash with such organizations with immediate and remote political aims, taking their names from respective communities and clans of their members. However, they were not ethnic militias as they are constituted today.

By the middle of colonialism in Nigeria, they speedily coalesced into pan-ethnic organizations like the Igbo State Union, the Hausa-Fulani Jamiyya Mutanen Arewa and the Yoruba Egbe Omo Oduduwa. These pan-ethnic organizations were to become important actors in the democratic struggles of Nigerian peoples against colonial rule, which culminated in independence in 1960. The sudden decline of Nigeria into authoritarian rule a few years after independence, characterized by nearly three decades of military rule, has been blamed on the political intervention of these ethnic organizations.[13] Consequently, when the military seized power and banned all political parties in 1966, at least 26 "tribal and cultural associations" were also banned.[14]

However, ethnic-political organizations remain central in Nigerian politics generally, and in the recent process of ending authoritarian rule in particular. Some of the organizations that emerged in this process include the Egbe Afenifere, literally meaning persons wishing to protect their interests in association with others and Egbe Ilosiwaju Yoruba (Association of Yoruba

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[11] Ibid, p. 7.
[12] J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1958; R. Sklar, "The Contribution of Tribalism to Nationalism", *Journal of Human Relations*, 2 (8), 1960, pp. 88-93; A. Smock "NCNC and Ethnic Unions in Biafra*"*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 7(1), 1969, pp. 101-121; O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in …,* 1978, p. 71-72

[13] Smock, "NCNC and Ethnic Unions…", 1969, p. 71
[14] Ojiako J, *13 Years of Military Rule, 1966-1979*, Lagos, Daily Times Publications, 1983 p. 20.

Progressives) claiming to represent Yoruba interests; the Mkpoko Igbo (Union of Igbos) for the Igbos; the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) for the minority Ogonis, and the Northern Elders Forum representing or perceived to represent Hausa-Fulani interests. Some of them have coalesced into larger inter-ethnic and regional ensembles like the Southern Mandate Group which purports to represent all ethnic interests in the South of the country.

The Nigerian State, Politics of Exclusion and Ethnic Militias in Nigeria

Here, we hypothesize that the politics of political and economic exclusion by the Nigerian state leads to the emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria. Political exclusion of other ethnic nationalities was epitomized in the political leadership at the federal level. From independence till 1999 the executive arm of the federal government has been dominated by the Northerners. This is an important arm of government and controls enormous resources. Table 1 below shows the lopsidedness of political leadership in Nigeria since independence

Table 1: President/Head of Government

S/N	Name	Period	Number of years	State	North or South
1	Balewa	Oct. 1 1960 – Jan. 1966	5 ¼ years	Bauchi	North
2	Ironsi	Jan. 15 1966 – July 1966	½ year	Abia	South
3	Gowon	July 1966 – July 1975	9 years	Plateau	North
4	Mohammed	July 1975 – Feb. 1976	½ year	Kano	North
5	Obasanjo	Feb. 1976 – Oct. 1979	3 ½ years	Ogun	South
6	Shagari	Oct. 1979 – Dec. 1983	4 ½ years	Sokoto	North
7	Buhari	Jan. 1984 – Aug. 1985	20 months	Katsina	North
8	Babangida	Aug. 1985 – July	8 years	Niger	North

		1993			
9	Shenokan	Aug. 1993 – Nov. 1993	3 months	Ogun	South
10	Abacha	Nov. 1993 – June, 1998	5 years	Kano	North
11	Abubakar	June 1998 – May 1999	1 year	Niger	North
12	Obasanjo	May 1999 – May 2007	8 years	Ogun	South
13	Yar'Adua	May 2007 – May 2010	3 years	Katsina	North
14	Jonathan	May 2010 – Date	1 ½ years	Bayelsa	South

Source: *By the author*

The gross under representation of the south especially the Niger Delta area in the executive positions or heads of state is complemented by a similar situation in the provision of social amenities, positions in the federal civil service, the police and other similar services.

Nine of out of fourteen leaders of National governments of Nigeria have come from one part – the north. Over fifty year's period of Nigerian independence, an expression has been created that northern Nigeria power brokers can only allow a Northerner to lead Nigeria, be it in a civilian or military government. Consequently, the question of competence of leaders and the correspondent ability to give positive leadership which can erect a virile and stable nation were made secondary to the primary decision to the northern hegemony. The pattern and history of political leadership in Nigeria is, therefore, the history of circulation of northern political elites in which the management of the state apparatuses have been alternating between them in the civilian and military governments. Out of the six successful military coup d'état in the country the north produced five heads of state or presidents. Once they are in power, they surround themselves with their kinsmen and preside over the allocation of public funds in their favour to the detriment of other sections of the Nigerian society.

Out of seven military rulers, the north had produced five. The Southern military leaders who in fact came to power by default or accident have been in charge for only four years, while the northern military rulers have ruled for a total of 24 years. That the south should rule the country by the permission of the north especially when an incumbent dies in office or abruptly removed from office and is replaced by someone from the south as were the cases with Ironsi, Obasanjo, Shenokan and Jonathan is insulting and reprehensible. We saw pervasive political instability within the executive arm when President Yar'Adua took ill and the northern members of the Federal Executive Council

164

made it difficult for the Vice President to step in as the acting president even though it was clear that Yar'Adua was seriously ill. It was pressure from civil society organizations that made the National Assembly to save what would have been one of the controversial constitutional crises in Nigeria by the introduction of the 'Doctrine of Necessity.' in which Jonathan was made an acting president.

Nigeria is one of the peripheral capitalist formations and emerged as a production of the extensive growth of capital at its monopoly stage which thrives on primitive capital accumulation and corruption.[15] Because resources of the state follows so rigidly and crudely the geometry of power, the distribution not the production of wealth is badly skewed against other ethnic members. This negative skewness can be attributed to the class character of the post-colonial state. The ruling class in post colonial Nigeria is highly fractions and roughly corresponds to the patterns of dominance during the colonial period. This class engages in grim factional battles for the control of state power. This arises from too high premium placed on political power. Consequently, as fractions this class has their particular interests served by the state and can only be conducive to exclusion and marginalization of groups and individuals, whether they are ethnic or sectional interests. To achieve and retain power in Nigeria, ethnic appeals were made. For the Nigerian governing class, development was synonymous with personal enrichment and the use of state power for this process has been theoretically and practically accepted by them.[16] Once state power is achieved it is always used for personal economic enrichment of those who have achieved it and for their supporters. This emergence of corruption and political manipulation is due essentially to the absence of an independent and creative ruling class of the type that brought the industrial revolution to the western world and Japan or even the self-disciplined and sacrificing type that engineered self-sustained growth in Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore.[17] Due to long history of neglect by the state, the people experience problems such as poverty, deprivation, non-availability of essential social amenities and services like electricity, hospitals, pipe borne water, quality education and environmental degradation unemployment, inequality and development deficit particularly in the Niger Delta.

Discussions of ethnic identity and its interface with the colonial state is a long-standing one dating to the works of anthropologists who worked in the country during the colonial period.[18] Many of these studies tended to

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[15] E. Ekekwe, *Class and State in Nigeria,* Ibadan, Longman Nigeria Ltd, 1986.

[16] Ibid., p. 113.

[17] O. Nnoli, "Nigeria: The Failure of the Neo-Colonial Society*",* Okwudiba Nnoli (Ed.), *Dead-End to Nigerian Development: An Analysis of the Political Economy of Nigeria, 1979-1989*, Senegal, CODESRIA, 1993, p. 4.

[18] Smith, 1965:67, Meek,1937:27, Perham,1937:25

romanticize ethnic identities and the cultural, social, and political systems of the various ethnic groups. They emphasized the political mobilization role of ethnicity in Nigeria's march to nationhood. Nigerian nationalists and expatiate writers influenced by them came to emphasize the positive contributions of the various ethnic identities to the independence movement and the social and political development of Nigeria.[19] This went against the grain of mainstream modernization school in the 1950s and 1960s which viewed communalism as a pre-modern phenomenon that is bound to decline with technological and economic development. On the contrary, communalism (religious and ethnic) has become a permanent and inherent feature of social change in Nigeria. Ethnicity is a historically, contingent and flexible social form, which was invented by colonial administrators and constantly reinvented by the post-colonial Nigeria elite to serve political purposes. Ethnicity is the creation of the exploitative project of colonialism and the manipulative politics of the petty bourgeoisie, and it serves a class project.[20] It is its class purpose that assumes the persistent politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria and other ethnic formations associated with it.

The increased number of ethnic associations has been linked to the character of the colonial urban setting. It has been argued that the high incidence of socio-economic frustration is a central element in the motivational complex that leads to ethnic identity and ethnic militia. Moreover, competition for scarce resources and opportunities among people of different ethnic identities in a contact situation is at the heart of ethnic conflicts.[21] Above all, the pattern of exclusion of ethnic groups both in politics and economic resources has a profound bearing on not only ethnic conflicts but also the emergence of ethnic militias. For instance, history shows that the segregation of blacks in America urban areas was important in the rise of the Black Power Movement.[22]

Urban centres in Nigeria offered little socio-economic security to the teaming population that migrates from the rural areas. In addition, the scarcities that characterize life in urban setting led to fierce socio-economic competition. With the current high rate of unemployment, this migration and socio-economic competition has become much fierce. The net effect of this situation is insecurity of individuals. This insecurity results from the search for limited job opportunities and social services. Once the members of a particular group gained access to the best jobs and other resources, they use their positions to find jobs for others or at least to pass on news of job opportunities to them. The repercussions were felt in unequal levels of unemployment, income and in

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[19] Coleman, Nigeria: Background to…, 1958, p. 319; Sklar, "The Contribution of…", *1960, p. 91*
[20] Nnoli, Ethnic Politics in…, 1978, p. 78
[21] Nnoli.1978:71
[22] S. Carmichael and C. Hamilton, *Black Power*, England, Penguin Books, 1968.

differing degrees of social status among the communal groups. Attempts by each group to escape the negative consequences of this phenomenon led to the further strengthening of communal associations.[23] The burgeoning ethnic formations and militias emanated from this kind of conditions although not the only factor. These ethnic formations provide co-ethnics the much needed social security and welfare and also equip them to compete with members of other ethnic groups. They become inserted into the state with pertinent effects. The dominance of the community be it clan, ethnicity, religion, etc over the individual is written into the very generic material of the state in Africa. It is in fact in the character of this state that the interface between it and ethnic militias are to be found. This type of state is not an objective force standing above society and holding its antagonisms in a balance, like the state that emerged from the establishment of capitalism in Europe.[24] It is rather a state constituted principally for conquering and holding down the peoples of Nigeria. As such, in the beginning, there was no question of evolving and routinizing principles for the non-arbitrary use of that state by those that control it. When in the post-colonial era it passed into the hands of a pseudo-bourgeoisie, fervently desirous to become economically dominant, this state became for its controllers a powerful instrument for acquiring private wealth; a monstrous instrument in the hands of individuals and their co-ethnics for pursuing private welfare to the exclusion of others.[25]

Two things emerge logically from the above points. One, the state in Nigeria principally deals with its members as social agents of ethnic groups, not as free, individual and equal citizens, and the power of that state exists as prebends parceled out to ethnic groups instead of a unified, objective and independent entity standing above society and expressing the corporate existence of the people-nation. Two, being the exclusive tool of those in power, who are agents of ethnic groups, defending their prebends becomes an overriding and war-like exercise waged among ethnic groups.[26]

Another important explanation for the emergence of ethnic militias in recent times in Nigeria is marked by many years of ban on political parties and muzzling of independent organizations and power centres in Nigeria. It may be permissible to state that this state of affairs leaves ethnic organizations as the most potentially effective organizations that could emerge quickly and with

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[23] (Nnoli,1995:40)
[24] O. Ibeanu, "The State and the Market: Reflections on Ake's Analysis of the State in the Periphery", *African Development*, XVIII (3), 1993, pp. 67-77

[25] O. Ibeanu and P. Mbah, Tribe, *Terror and Transition: The Role of Ethno-Political Organizations in the Transition from Military Rule to Democracy in Nigeria, 1993 – 1998.* Unpublished Manuscript, 2006.
[26] Ibid.

minimal prompting as political liberalization is embarked on by an authoritarian regime. This occurs for two reasons. One, their recruitment base exists, fixed and exclusive to them. Second, the catalyst for them to emerge is readily present: elite that preys on the fears and anxieties of ordinary people mobilizing them by raising the specters of ethnic domination. Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 was a critical juncture for ethnic militias in the country. It does appear that for the ethnic organizations, having worked for sixteen years to overthrown military rule, they were patently ill-prepared for life under a civilian political regime that is yet far-off from full democratic institutionalization. Consequently, the aftermath of military rule and its suppressive character has been a transition after the transition for ethnic political organizations, and how this transition has panned out is still to be seen in silhouettes.[27]

Three strands of interconnected analysis stand out clearly and they help us to understand the link between the Nigerian state and the formation or emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria. First, one of the most glaring paradoxes of the petro-state in Nigeria is the level of poverty in the country with its huge oil resources. About two-thirds of the Nigeria people are poor.[28] This is despite the fact, that the country has vast potential wealth. Although revenues from crude oil have been on the increase over the past decades, Nigerians have been falling deeper into poverty. In 1980 according to the National Planning Commission, an estimated 27 percent of Nigerians lived in poverty.[29] By 1999, about 70 percent of the population had income of less than $1 a day and the figure has continued to go up. Inflation has risen by leaps and bounds and the value of the national currency (the Naira) has fallen dramatically from about $1=N3 in 1986 to $1 = N152 in 2010. According to the report, poverty levels vary across the country, with the highest proportion of poor people in the northwest and the lowest in the southeast. One of the most important aspects of poverty is lack of income, including food, shelter, clothing and empowerment including political power, confidence, dignity and hope. They produce inequality and stifle the political power of certain sectors of the population. Connected with poverty is Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance; Nigeria being one of the most corrupt countries in the world. This is because corruption has been institutionalized as a way of life thereby making Nigeria one of the weakest economies in the world. This is

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[27] O. Ibeanu, *Civil Society and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, 2006.

[28] National Planning Commission, *National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS),* Abuja, National Planning Commission, 2004, p. xiii.

[29] Ibid.

despite the fact that oil export earnings of about $300 billion since the mid-1970s. Nigerians die in their thousands every day, from ignorance, hunger, disease and squalor and suffer early miserable death. Despite Nigeria's status as a major oil exporting country, a sharp contradiction exists between the fact that Nigeria is the World's 12th largest exporter of oil, and the fact that the standard of living in Nigeria is the 36th lowest in the world, in terms of human development indicator. According to the UNDP 2002 Human Development Report, life expectancy at birth is below 50 for both men and women. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.462, placing it in the 148th, out of a total of 173 countries. In terms of HDI, Nigeria falls below (0.548), Zimbabwe (0.551), Kenya (0.513) and Togo (0.493).[30]

It is estimated that Nigeria lost about US $400 billion to waste and corruption between 1960 and 2005.[31] Interestingly, in the same period, external aid reaching the whole of Africa from Europe and America amounted roughly to US $650 billion. Consequently upon this condition, waste and corruption have continued unabated today in spite of the rhetorical commitment to the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The governing elite squander the historically accumulated fund of social capital, and create a monumental power chasm between those who govern and those who are governed. This condition is creating very difficult situations in implementing socio-economic agenda that demand strong and widespread support from the Nigerians. The legitimacy and stability of the state suffered, as people began to devise ways that lay outside the law to survive, for example through ethnic militia organizations. These painted pictures have made crime one of the most lucrative businesses in Nigeria; armed robbery, especially bank robbery, kidnapping, fraud,) religions fundamentalism such as Boko Haram etc.

The foregoing situations have made Nigeria become a "rentier state". Harneit –Sievers summarizes the Nigerian rentier state thus:

> A rentier state is a state whose major sources of revenue does not arise from taxation on productive activities – agriculture, industries, and services undertaken by its economically active populations. Instead, the rentier state lives by collecting a convenient income from sources into which it invest little or nothing. Rent comes in without opportunity costs, and if it comes in as

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[30] UNDP, *Human Development Report*, New York, UNDP, 2000, p. 59.

[31] H.A. Asobie, "*The Answers Lies with Us*", a presidential address presented at the 26th annual conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association held at Bayero University, Kano, from August 21-24, 2007, p.7.

centralized as in the case of oil, it is even more convenient, from the treasury's point of view.[32]

The rentier state encouraged the emergence of a rent seeking and unproductive culture of over-dependence on government patronage and contracts with little value added. In effect, wealth in natural resources, combining with a weak economy and poor governance, turns into what has been called the "resource curse", a wholesale destruction of economic, social and political structures, including the undermining of the country's institutional set up, leading to poverty, absence of social and public welfare and underdevelopment.

According to the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria in his recent statement "Youth employment rate has hit 41.6%". Such social indicators are one of the major drivers of social melee and poverty problems in the country. In gender specific terms the figure is 23.3 percent for males and 17 percent for females within the age bracket of 15-24 years.[33] No effort by the government with its current economic efforts will only be a snapshot if the real economic agents, who are the youths, are not part of the transformation.

The most fundamental forces, which propel ethnic nationalism and emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria, are those of pervasive poverty, mass unemployment, and underdevelopment of productive forces and non-absorbance of the economy. The absence of developed productive forces constrains the transformation of the structures of the economy and society. Mass poverty and unemployment creates alienation and insecurity. Poverty also creates frustration and divisiveness. At the level of government it makes the control of the state and its enormous power apparatus very vicious.[34]

Secondly, in Nigeria, national security contradicts the security of nationals because of the politics of oil.[35] According to him, this has to be linked to the rule of a militariat and its attempts to maintain its social dominance in the face of declining petroleum rents, pressure from international finance capital and domestic discontent over its rule. By the militariat, Ibeanu designate a social category, which though related to the Nigerian military, is not

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[32] A. Harniet-Sievers A, *Reforming the Rentier State: Some Thoughts on Needs*, Sam Amadi and Francis Ogwo (Eds.), *Contextualizing Needs Economic/Political Reform in Nigeria*, Lagos: HURILAWS and CPPR, 2004, p. xiii.

[33] L. Olanrewaju, "Youth Unemployment Rate Hits 41.6%", *CBN Gov. Daily Sun*, 19 July 2011, p. 47.

[34] B. Babangida, *Ethnic Nationalities and the Nigerian State*, http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/earticles/ethnic_nationalities_and_of the nig.htm , 2002.

[35] Ibeanu, *Civil Society and Conflict…, p. 34.*

coextensive with it. A good starting point for understanding the militariat is the understanding of the military's dominance of the Nigerian state.

The Nigerian military was created by the British colonial government. It has undergone transformation ever since its creation from the colonial period to the post military era. The main transformation was propelled essentially, but by no means exclusively, by politics. In the years after independence, the military was set to serve ethnic interests and group, thereby transforming it into a prop for ethno-political factions. It was in this formation that the civil was (1967-1970) ensured. After the war, civil-political control of the military was further undermined due to huge personal wealth acquired by individual officers from war contracts and massive post-war reconstruction which ended civil control over the military. From around 1986, the top upper echelons of the Nigerian military became the core of an emerging social category. This transformation essentially came from the extensive economic and political reforms of the mid-1980s under the popular structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The military led this reform programmes at the movement, and as well led to the crystallization of the militariat. As a social category, the Nigerian militariat was inserted with pertinent effects at all the levels of structures – political, economic and ideological.[36] This militariat is composed of both military and civilian agents. They include the local business classes and foreign investors. The strongest defining interest of the military and civilian agents is the use of the state for private accumulation through public works contracts and embezzlement of public funds. According to Ibeanu, the dominance of the militariat balances on three props namely, authoritarianism, communalism (in its ethnic form) and petro-business. Although the military rule has ended in 1999 but the militariat has produced and reproduced itself socially and they still dominate the governance of the country with its militarist tendencies.

Third, there is a contradictory condition of security project which the militariat pursues. It is regime security in which the tendency of the people in power is to privatize the instrumentalities of the state, using them to pursue the private interests of state officials, co-ethnics and petro-business. This can be seen through constant harassment of the leaders of popular movements, organizations, and groups. They instigate inter-communal conflicts along ethnic, religious and clan lines. The experience of the Ijaw ethnic minority in Bayelsa illustrates the case of aggression of the Nigerian state against their own people. The Odi and Zaki-Biam massacre in 1999 and 2000 respectively and other repressive attacks against Nigerians are illustrative. The hope of crude oil becoming the engine of development in Nigeria has now been completely dashed.[37] Inter-ministerial intrigues, squabbles, and diverse political

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[36] Ibid., p. 35.
[37] Ibid., p. 44.

calculations in government including corruption and embezzlement of such funds have become daily occurrence. The formation of ethnic militia to engage the Nigerian state has in the course of history become inevitable not only in Nigeria, but in other Africa countries, such as the Mau-Mau in Kenya, and other oppressed classes struggling for emancipation.

In spite of all the foregoing problems, the current democratic dispensation has worsened the situation of exclusion of Nigerian masses through the state implementation of neo-liberal economic policies. Although it started in 1986 with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the Babangida regime, the country sank into deep crisis of various dimensions and proportions with the reintroduction and continuation of the reform programmes in Nigeria. Neo-liberal economic policy is the ideology of the invisible Hand of the market. In this process, the authority of the market is unchallenged. As an ideology of the Western capitalist states, it contains meanings, ideas, and values based on the social tenets of classical liberalism with its attendant imperialist tendencies. It supplies a repertoire of strategies through which people may be dominated, subordinated, assimilated and excluded from social, political, and economic privileges.

Today under the auspices of globalization which drives neo-liberal economic policies, the role of the Nigerian state and society in defining and protecting the public interest are being whittled away by a global campaign of privatization, deregulation, and removal of state subsidies, liberalization and commercialization of public enterprises. However, the privatization of public enterprises in Nigeria is the continuous enrichment of the members of the ruling class as the viable public enterprises have been bought by them including Nigerian Telecommunication Limited (NITEL), NICON NUGA Hotels etc. And just as Polanyi foresaw, this doctrine is leading us directly towards demolition. The idea that the market should be allowed to make social and political decision, the idea that the state should voluntarily reduce its role in the economy, or that corporations should be given total freedom, and that citizens should be given much less rather than more social goods are creating negative impact in society.

Those in control of central state power are too engaged in defending and holding on to state power. Defensive politics has become state policy and our leaders are faced with the challenges of warding off threats while avoiding substantive national issues. It is from this that ethnic militias evolved and emerged as a complementary instrument or a counterforce for state repression and oppression.

Ethnic Militias: Origin and Composition

It is estimated that Nigeria is made up of over 250 ethnic groups. This estimation about the number of ethnic nationalities in the post-colonial social formation is due to the problem of definitional elements in distinguishing one ethnic group from the other. However, the existence of multi-ethnic groups in

Nigeria does not by itself constitute a problem of any political consequences. Perhaps, it is in the process of social change or modernization that the interest of ethnic groups becomes elevated to the political realm.[38] This is because post-colonial development in Nigeria appears to have elevated ethnic nationalities into the corner stone of social and political organizations. The earlier propositions in the academic circle of social change and modernization weakening or destroying ethnic nationalities have been proved wrong. This is because ethnic groups in Nigeria have gained more consciousness and activism, and even leading to the emergence of new ones.

The themes of modernization and liberalism have in general terms taken the position that as mankind moves from pre-capitalist and tribal stage of social organization towards large-scale industrialization and commerce within the modern nation system, the various primordial ties of religion, kinship, language and ethnic solidarity would gradually lose their hold on a people or community and they would disappear. In realm of politics, liberal thought assumed that ethnicity and sub-nationalism would disappear in the currency of modernization.[39] However, these assumptions have not been proven right. This is because inter-ethnic conflicts and ethno-nationalities have tended to increase as social horizons of various ethnic nationalism increases in response to the processes of modernization and development. Consequently, conflict arises in the process and is defined in ethnic terms, and this tends to exacerbate social cleavages.

The Nigerian state as it emerged and formed was part of the challenges of ethnic nationalism. As a power site, the state is neither neutral nor objective as an organization in the discharge of its responsibilities. The pursuit of power and wealth and the politics of exclusion and alienation by the Nigerian state in a mutually reinforcing network of relationship and linkages led to the emergence of ethnic militia. With the weakness of the post-colonial state in Nigeria, people increasingly had to cater for themselves by resorting to primordial sources of identification and assistance. Before the introduction of structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria, the Welfarist state was the guarantor and provider of socio-economic existence in Nigeria. The state played central role in the economy as subsidizers, employers, investors, regulators and providers of basic social services such as health, education and public security.[40] With the introduction of SAP in 1986 and the opening of the democratic space in 1999, the government of Obasanjo continued with the SAP

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[38] Babangida, *Ethnic Nationalities…, p. 2.*
[39] Ibid.
[40] A. Ebo, "Small Arms Proliferation in Nigeria: A Preliminary Overview", Okechukwu. Ibeanu and Fatima Mohammed (Eds.), *Oiling Violence: The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Niger Delta*, Lagos, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2005, p. 4.

in what he called economic reforms. With regard to this reform, perhaps most significant of all World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy recommendations, is the insistence on "rolling back" the state. The state was perceived as standing in the way of self-regulating market forces and therefore an impediment to economic growth, and so, it has to be retrenched. On the other hand, the harsh demands of structured adjustment had increased pressures on the state to come to the rescue of the Nigerian masses, whose lives were literally being sapped out of them.[41] Of course, there was increased demand for the services of the state because of a corresponding drastic reduction and decline in the capacity of the Nigerian state to meet such demands. In response to the increasing failure of the state to meet ever-rising expectations of the populace (food, social security, education, employment, general security, health etc), alternative structures emerged, such as ethnic militias, vigilantes, religious, and gender organizations among others. These came as a result of the state becoming increasingly impotent in meeting the basic needs of the population, and the people looked for alternative ways of meeting these needs. Security is one of these unmet needs, hence privatization of security, crime, and the acquisition of arms for self protection, and as instruments of political and socio-economic negotiation.[42]

There is a long history of militia in different countries across the world. They, however, serve different purposes at different times as in France, China, U.S.A, Germany, Canada, Australia etc. Most militias are armed and espouse both political and economic protests. In Nigeria, ethnic militias are essentially youth based groups formed with the purpose of promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their ethnic groups, and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence.[43] The phenomenon of the rise of ethnic militias in Nigeria emerged as a result of economic hardship which made ordinary people on the street unable to tolerate and bear any more economic strangulation.

In Nigeria, militia groups are spread across parts of the country, but the most organized are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), the Egbesu Boys, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) all in the South-South of geo-political zone; others include the O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the South-West, the Bakassi Boys and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South-East and a plethora of Islamic vigilantes called Hisbah in Sharia-

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[41] Ibid., p. 4.
[42] Ibid.
[43] S. Adejumobi, *"Ethnic Militia Groups and the National Question in Nigeria",* Social Science Research   http://www.programs.ssrc.org/gsc/gsc/newsletter8/content/adejumobi/printable.html   , 2002.

practising northern states and in addition, the most recent Islamic sect called the Boko Haram in the North-east of Nigeria. The rise of these groups is that of violence, communal conflicts, and the right of ethnic minorities, self determination and political and economic exclusion engendered by the Nigerian state. Most often, their activities have been criminalized by the Nigerian state and consequently, adopted extreme force to affect social control. The Nigerian state is a state maintained and sustained by military force. Therefore, all forms of peaceful popular agitations between 1960 and now, has always been repressed. These include the crushing of the Adaka Boro rebellion of the 1960s, the MOSOP rebellion of the 1990s, the notorious Major Okutimo Internal Security Task Force of the 1990s, the Odi and Zaki-Biam invasion of 1999 and 2000 respectively, the Joint Task Force of 2003 etc. which are currently laying siege across the Niger Delta region.[44] Due to limited space we will discuss only four ethnic militia organizations in Nigeria.

The O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC)

The OPC is a militant socio-cultural Yoruba organization founded in 1995 by Fredrick Fasehun, a medical doctor with a group of other Yoruba intellectuals. The OPC professes to work toward the unity, progress, protection, and autonomy of all descendants of Oduduwa. Its name came from Oduduwa, the folk progenitor of the Yorubas. This group is self-styled the patron saint of the Yoruba people, one of Nigeria's largest ethnic groups. The group was formed in August 1995 in the wake of the crises that greeted the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, which the late Chief MKO Abiola, a Yoruba man, was believed to have won. While a crop of middle-class intellectuals heads the group, the bulk of its membership is illiterate and semi-illiterate. Although the OPC is believed to have many high-profile patrons, including state governors who use them to settle political scores, the group is largely sustained by contributions from bus drivers and residents who solicit protection from thieves. From 1999 the OPC changed its fundamental objective from seeking self-determination for the Yoruba people to crime-fighting activities and the settlement of personal disputes. This change in the focus of the group may have been inspired by the popularity of other self-appointed vigilante groups like the Bakassi Boys in the southeast, notorious for its brutal extra-judicial killings.[45]

At present OPC is made up of intellectuals and unemployed youths from the Yoruba extraction. Their equipment of operation includes guns, machetes and charms. The group wants the Yorubas to be treated as equals or

[44] I. Ojefia, "*The Nigerian State and the Niger Delta Question",* Paper presented at the 22nd annual conference of the association of Third World Studies, Georgia, USA, 2004, P. 5, http://www.deltastate.gov.ng/oyefia.htm /http://nigeriaworld.com/articles/2004/sep/071.html.

[45] Nigeria First, www.nigeriafirst.org. retrieved on 12 January, 2012

they would opt out of the Nigerian federation and establish an Oduduwa Republic. This was sort of a protest against the Nigerian State. This was sequel to their original objectives for self-determination and social emancipation of the Yorubas.

However, it is important to note that the government's feeble challenge to the OPC created a demonstration effect and indeed led to emergence of rival ethno-militant groups like the Ijaw National Congress(INC) the MASSOB, and the APC, all with vibrant branches in the congested and multi-ethnic neighborhood of Lagos.

The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)

The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is one of the most vocal ethnic militia groups in Nigeria. It is separatist movement founded on 13th September, 1999 and led by Chief Raph Uwazurike, an Indian trained lawyer. This group's vision is to revive the former secessionist state of Biafra, which was created in 1967 by the Ibo ethnic group and defeated after three years of Civil War in 1970.

It has its main objectives as:

- To actualize the independent nation of Biafra
- To use peaceful means only
- To support all entities using peaceful means to bring about Biafra
- To encourage sincere and honest dialogue with all nations in Nigeria aimed at peaceful separation of Biafra (other nations if they so desire)
- To inform the rest of the world about Biafra actualization (Biafra Nation)

From the foregoing MASSOB seems to be non-violent separatist movement with the aim of achieving self-determination. Although the group claimed to be non-violent in its activities, the potential for engaging in violent actions is extremely high in Nigeria's volatile social and political environment.[46] MASSOB has been on regular collision with the police, leading to the deaths of both its members and those of security agents. Between December 2000 and April 2001, MASSOB members had severe clashes with the police when the MASSOB youths seized northbound fuel tankers. The youths claimed that there was imbalance in the distribution of petroleum products in the country at the expense of the southeast. Fundamentally, the emergence of MASSOB may be due to the long years of Igbo marginalization and the inability of the state to address this

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[46] Agbu, *Ethnic Militias and the Threat…, p. 17.*

injustice especially in the federal executive and executive of the federal government. On 27 May 2000 Mr. Uwazurike gathered over 10,000 youths in Aba and made an unsuccessful attempt to launch the "New Biafran" national anthem, currency notes, national flag and constitution. During the botched launch, he declared that the group had been created to protect Ibos against lethal attacks, particularly by upholders of Sharia laws in Kaduna state in the North. But MASSOB does not enjoy the support of the Igbo elite. Ohaneze Ndigbo, the apex body of pan-Ibo groups, has expressed its opposition to the group. Similarly, the governors of the five south-eastern states have dissociated their states governments and people of their states from the activities of MASSOB.[47]

The Egbesu Boys of Africa: The Egbesu Boys of Africa is the militia group of the dominant Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta region. The Ijaws are scattered across six states: Bayelsa, Rivers, Edo, Delta, Ondo and Akwa Ibom. Egbesu is their mythical god of revenge. The Egbesu Boys of Africa are considered the military wing of the Ijaw National Congress, which has vowed to fight against the exploitation of the people of the Niger Delta by oil multi-nationals and the Nigerian Government. The activities of the Egbesu Boys consist of kidnapping foreign oil workers for ransom, sabotaging oil installations and attacking security agents. Lately wealthy individuals in the Niger Delta region have also used them as "private armies." The Egbesu Boys are popular for the ultimatum they issued in December 1998, called the" Kaiama Declaration," which demanded the immediate withdrawal of all military personnel in the Niger Delta. The youths declared that any oil company that employed the services of the armed forces of the Nigerian Government to "protect" its operation would be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people. The Egbesu Boys have also expressed solidarity with other militia groups in the country such as the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) and the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). In confrontations with Government and members of the Nigerian armed forces, the Egbesu Boys have destroyed the entire communities such as Odi and Umuechem. These Ijaw youths are known to possess sophisticated weapons, which are reportedly provided by retired military officers in the area.[48]

1. **The Hisbah Groups**: The Hisbah groups are Islamic vigilantes in the predominantly Muslim States of the North that have adopted the Sharia legal system over the past three years. The States are: Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano, Jigawa, Katsina and Kaduna in the

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[47] Nigeria First, www.nigeriafirst.org, retrieved on 12 January 2012
[48] Nigeria First, www.nigeriafirst.org, retrieved on 12 January 2012

northwest; Yobe, Borno, Bauchi and Gombe in the northeast; as well as Niger State in the north central region. None of the Hisbah groups is well organised, and neither do they have any central command. But they have often spearheaded violent conflicts with Christians and other non-Muslims in the North. Most of the Hisbah groups are sponsored by state governments that practice Sharia, and draw their membership from the army of the unemployed in those states. In most cases, the Hisbah groups arbitrarily arrest offenders of the Sharia legal code and dispense their version of justice without recourse to the traditional law enforcement agencies.[49]

When ethnic tensions emerged in the new democratic order in 1999, the initial reaction was that it was the product of previously bottled-up disenchantment of various ethnic nationalities. It is permissible to state that there is a linkage in all the agitations in Nigeria from the Isaac Adaka Boro resistance of 1966, agitations for state creation in the first and second Republics, Ken Saro-Wiwa's MOSOP; Kaima Declaration, environment right struggles, to the current agitation for resource control and fiscal federalism. The organizational forms, the scale of mobilization and the specific agenda canvassed by the militia groups have changed according to the historical circumstances, but the common factors for equity and autonomous space is unmistakable. MEND, NDVF, MASSOB and OPC emerged as a result of political and economic exclusion. OPC precisely emerged due essentially to the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential elections won by M.K.O Abiola, a Yoruba which the north did not want to be president of Nigeria.

2. **Conclusion and the Way Forward**

We have argued that the nature and character of the Nigerian state including its construction, composition, its rentier nature, its power structure as well as the parasitic and parochial behaviour of its hegemonic ruling class and the emergence of the politics of exclusion along ethnic lines largely account for the emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria. State corruption, total absence of welfare and the implementation of economic reform measures increases poverty and grievances against the state. The grievances border on inequity in the distribution of state power, economic, and other social resources which led to the emergence of ethnic militias that contest the political space with the state in resource allocation and power.

It cannot be assumed that democracy will bring food to the table of everyone in Nigeria. It cannot also be assumed that democracy will solve quickly the problems of Nigerians economically without people-centred

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[49] Nigeria First, www.nigeriafirst.org, retrieved on 12 January 2012

initiatives. This is because ethnic militias came about because the Nigerian state has suddenly become an instrument for exclusion from social goods. People-centred initiatives are needed because human beings, who live in communities, are the primary resource for development and the target of economic and social goods.

We need economic and political systems that secure effective citizen participation in decision making, and are flexible with the capacity for self-correction. Participation is the key to empowerment. Empowerment breeds self-reliance and self-reliance means more effective action. Self-reliance development, especially of food and basic necessities within natural resource constraints is needed. This is because self-reliance prevents "dependence" and this helps to ensure equality, democracy and accountability.

Where significant inequalities exist, the very powerful exploit and consume resources beyond sustainable levels, and the very powerless exploit the limited resources and this creates greater threat to society and this may lead to civil and political conflict. The existence of the Nigerian state is inter-twined with its history of authoritarianism, and more specifically military governance. The country was under military rule for thirty years, throughout most of its post-independence history. The militarized state was authoritarian and rapacious, but at the same time increasingly fragile, corrupt and unable to deliver development.[50]

An inclusive and robust economic growth can only be achieved should the youths be adequately empowered. This is the only path to sustainable economic development and to stem the rising tide of ethnic militias in Nigeria. The Nigerian governments at all levels must initiate some youth empowerment programmes in order to complement other initiatives of the private sector and development partners. There is a serious need to create investible fund by banks to tackle the major challenge of youth entrepreneurship development through initiative interventions by developing internal capacity that will de-risk lending to the youths. This idea is imperative in view of the fact that Nigeria needs to step down reliance on external sources to finance development due to dwindling donor fund and fatigue. The intervention should focus on creating an enabling environment including access to long term financing by youth entrepreneurs, young businesses and startups along the business value chain in order to enhance their productivity and ensuring that they fully play their strategic role and compete globally.

The ethnic nature of the militias in Nigeria points to a failure of the state to address certain basic fundamental issues in Nigeria. Fundamentally,

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[50] O. Ibeanu and R. Luckham, *Niger-Delta; Political Violence, Governance and Corporate Responsibility in a Petro State,* Abuja, Centre for Democracy and Development, 2006, p. 8.

these issues include political and economic equity, safety to lives and property, human rights and resource control. Since peace and justice are vital to total development of the state and society, therefore, Nigerians need to promote, encourage and support the immediate inauguration of a National Conference; where everyone including the ethnic militias can table and discuss their fears and grievances and work out a compromise acceptable to all. Until this is done, the various ethnic militia organizations will remain "at risk" or endangered organizations whose membership and operation will be subjected to strict state scrutiny.[51] In transitory democracy such as Nigeria the role of civil society which allows mobilization for the securing of human rights and dignity is of extreme importance.

Mankind's most fundamental needs are economic in nature. It is permissible to state that economic hardship dialectically generated the emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria in the first instance and political exclusion consolidated its formation in the second instance. Both endangered the existence of people and undermined their livelihood. There is the need to re-examine how to reconstitute the Nigerian state so as to endow it with a modicum of neutrality, objectivity and justice in its operations.

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[51] K. Oladele, (2004). *Ethnic Militias in Nigeria, 2004, p.10*

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