

Boundary Conflict and Security Challenges in the Western Coast of the Niger Delta: The Ilaje-Ijo War Factor, 1998-99

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Abstract

One of the problematic issues on African sustainable development in recent times has been that of insecurity. The paper discusses security problems in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the effects on regional and national development. Using the Ilaje/Ijo war of 1998 as a case study, the paper identifies some economic, social and political factors as the causes of the war. It also explores the geographical peculiarities of the region to explain the special features of the war. Central to the discussion are the lingering socio-economic consequences of the war in relation to general socio-economic problems it has created in the region. The paper makes some recommendations on how inter-communal conflicts could be curbed in the African communities.

Keywords: Boundary conflict, Security challenges, Lagoon warfare, Natural resources, Economic values

Introduction

In recent times, there has been an alarming rate of insecurity being caused by inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts among various groups of people in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Studies have shown that most of these conflicts have been influenced by strong resistance to deprivation, the urge by groups to control and have the larger share of available natural resources, greater political involvement, adequate provision of social amenities by government, struggle for ethnic supremacy, as well as boundary tussle and cultural identity (Bina Odogun, 2008, :137). These factors were germane and central to the causes of the Ilaje-Ijo war which broke out in the western fringe of the Niger Delta, specifically the coastal Yorubaland of Ondo state in 1998.

This war, both in characteristics and organizational dimensions has obviously demonstrated existence of potent and modern indigenous form of military tactics and diplomacy in lagoon warfare of note in Nigeria and indeed Africa. These features could be underscored in the adoption of skills of water folk, use of indigenous charms, propaganda and sophisticated weapons during the war. Though some studies have been made on this war, including other inter-communal crises in the Niger Delta such as; *urhobo-itsekiri*, *Okrika-Andoni*, *Okrika-Ogoni*, *Ijo-urhobo* Crisis and so on, none has actually brought to the fore the lingering consequences on economic and security issues in the area.

This study is therefore, an exploration into the war by offering historical explanations to the causes, course and dimensions of the war. Central to discussion are; economic, social and political consequences of the war as these have been affecting both regional and national security in Nigeria. The study concludes by condemning the incessant out-break of destructive internecine conflicts in the region and makes some recommendations on how to curb them.

Concept of Security

Today, the issue of security has become the strongest nexus of global relations among the communities of the world. It has become the commonest instrument through which peace and development strive at both local and international levels. Security, as defined by Encarta Dictionary, (2008) means the state or feeling of being safe and protected, coupled with the assurance that something of value will not be taken away (Encarta Dictionary Microsoft, 2008). Security is also seen as something that provides a sense of protection against loss, attack or harm (Encarta Dictionary Microsoft, 2008).

Security is defined as a freedom or protection from danger or worry and a measure taken to guarantee the safety of a country, person and thing of value (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1995). National security is therefore, the protection of a nation from attack or other danger by maintaining adequate armed forces and guarding the state secrets (Alamu, 2010, :145).

The security of the state, the people, property, territory and that of the environment is a must in which every member of the society should be involved. In the pre-colonial Yoruba society and indeed, Nigeria for instance, the traditional rulers were obliged to secure the lives and property of their people by appointing security agents such as Basorun (minister of defence and Balogun (warlords), hunters, medicine men and cultists. This is a strong indication that the culture of security strategy is not new to African society. As a matter of fact, the security of Nigerian state is failing if not failed and this has become a major problem on development stride in recent times in Nigeria. Cases of killing, unemployment, restiveness, thuggery, kidnapping, armed robbery, child trafficking, political assassination, electoral fraud, inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts, poverty, terrorism, intimidation and other related vices have been endemic in the country (Olukoju, 2003, :4-5).

Given this backdrop, Nigerian citizens are still living in fears, worries and state of despair in their fatherland. Evidently, the state can no longer protect her citizens adequately from these insidious vices. The end result is therefore, insecurity which makes it difficult for people to live in peace and safety as well as conveniently overcome their developmental problems. It therefore, indicates that any act that does not allow peace, progress, safety and development to thrive constitutes insecurity.

A Brief Geographical Description of the Warzone

Perhaps a geographical description of the area would give us some insight for understanding the true nature and characteristics of the war. Geographically, the war zone, which forms a large proportion of the coastal fringe of the western Niger Delta is a plain deltaic terrain which stretches from the estuary of Benin river (Bight of Benin) in the east and terminates in the west at Ayetoro (Ehinmore, 2010, :22). It is about sixty kilometers long along the coast line. The coastal region is entirely peopled and occupied by the Ilaje in a linear settlement pattern. Other nucleated Ilaje settlements are also found in the hinterland of the region with some Ijo groups. The area is characterized by mangrove vegetation inland with open muddy grassland at the sea-shore. It is characterized by muddy and flooded land (seasonally), swamps, estuaries, shallow and deep water (Alagoa, 1972, :11). It is this large network of waterways that permitted such large scale lagoon and sub-marine warfare in the region. Being water folks, the belligerent groups exploited this geographical location and factors to their advantage.

Theoretical Considerations

The overall causes of the Ilaje-Ijo war of 1998 could best be understood on the premises of human need theory which holds that, all human beings in any society of the world have basic needs (physiological, social, psychological, economic and spiritual) which they strive to satisfy. A deprivation of these needs by other groups or persons would engender conflict (Fasoranti and Fayankinnu, 2007:37). Scholars are in agreement that conflict is a central issue of human society and that society and organization are best studied and understood within the framework of conflicting interest (Abraham, 1982: 1 03).

Adam Smith, Robert Malthus and a generation of economists have placed economic competition at the centre of human conflicts, While Thomas Hobbes identified power relations within the state as the primary source, Karl Marx postulated that, class struggle arising from the unequal distribution of wealth and resources remains the major causes of conflict (Dalli, 1997:8). Dahrendorf has strongly stressed that, conflict can only temporarily be suppressed, regulated, channeled and controlled, but that neither a philosopher-king nor a modern dictator can abolish it once and for all since social conflicts are inherent in the nature of social organization (Abraham, 1982:112).

Whichever way one views it, it is obvious that conflict is a key characteristic of human society from the least to the most advanced one. The theories identified above are appropriately applicable to this study because, they capture the social and historical dynamics of the Ilaje-Ijo war which its major causal factors were deep-rooted in struggle for economic values, political power and prestige.

The War in Historical Perspective

The ugbo group of the Ilaje and the Arogbo group of the Ijo have both been living in the riverine region of the present day Ondo state for many centuries. Historical sources of both groups prove that they are both migrants to the region. However, while the Ilaje are said to be of internal migration to the area, the Ijo are of external migration. According to a recorded source, the Arogbo-Ijo migrated from Gbaraun in Apoi-Ibe of the central Delta in the present day southern Ijo Local Government Area of Bayelsa state to their present location in Ondo State, probably between the 16th and first half of the 18th centuries (Alagoa, 1972; 35-36, 1976:336-338).

The ugbo-Ilaje on the other hand are said to have migrated to the region from Ile-Ife and arrived the area in about 10th century. Both Ugbo and Ife traditions as well as several written and oral sources agree that the Ugbo were one of the aborigines of pre-Oduduwa Ife whom Oduduwa met and dislodged and established a new dynasty (Akinjogbin & Ajandele, 1980:123, Fabunmi 1985:39, Obayemi (1979:166-167). In protest of Oduduwa's takeover of political power in about 800A.D and for other factors, the Ugbo-Ilaje migrated out of Ife and later settled in their present location after 800 A.D (Akinjogbin, 2002, :16, Fabunmi, 1985, :39, Atanda, 2007, :56-57). Having spent many years on the way, the Ugbo arrived at the region probably in the 10th century (Ehinmore, 2010: 30-31). While the Ilaje are into farming, trading, in-land and deep-sea fishing and exclusively occupy the coastal fringe of the area (Ehinmore 2010, :3), the Ijo are in-land inhabitants whose main occupations are wine tapping, in-landing fishing and canoe carving (Alagoa, 1972, :33).

Due to long stretch of uninhabited area of mangrove swamps and creeks in the hinterland of the region, the actual extent of the Ilaje and Ijo territory is very difficult to measure (Curwen, 1937, :4). Thus, the actual boundary between the Ugbo-Ilaje and Arogbo-Ijo is not clearly defined. As marine folks, the Ugbo-Ilaje have many of their towns located along the coastline. As an in-land fishing group, the Arogbo-Ijo have their towns in Ondo state located in the hinterland (Uriel, 2013, Oral information). There had been intergroup relations between the two groups in the areas of trade, marriage and cultural diffusion for many years.

It should be noted that the 1998 war was not the first conflict which had broken out between the two groups. Intergroup conflicts usually occur any time there is conflicting interest over control of resources such as land, tenamate issue, ethnic superiority and differences in political ideology. In this context, each group consciously manipulates to maximize its interest and would want to dominate the other for the control of the available resources and acquisition of prestige to its advantage when there is the opportunity. One of the notable of these conflicts was the Ilaje-Ijo war of 1898, tagged *Ogun Totor* (Totor war) which was led by an Ijo man named Totor. With the defeat of the Ijo in the war, there had been temporary stoppage of the Ijo's quest for control of the land in *Apata-Ilaje* area (Erejuwa, 2000, :5)

Some remote factors which precipitated the war of 1998 included claims by the Ijo that the Ilaje people usually refer to them as tenants which they found repugnant and dehumanizing. They argued that since they had lived in the area for many years, the term, tenants would be debasing and inappropriate for their description (Legbe, 2013, oral interview). Unequal distribution of wealth and issue of unequal political appointments were also questioned by the Ijo. Over the years, this had been developing some internal rifts between the two groups, a situation in which the Ijo have been crying of marginalization and unfair treatment in the political and economic affairs of the area.

The immediate cause of this war was the crisis over the ownership of Apapata, a claimed oil rich portion of land in the coastal area of Ondo state. However, whether this place is actually oil-rich or not has not been subjected to scientific or historical validity. What is available to researchers is that both groups engaged in interpretations and definitions by making recourse to history as to justify their ownership of the area. For the Arogbo-Ijo, Apata was founded by migrant Ijo fishermen, though they were unable to identify specific names. This claim is further reinforced by the fact that, since one of their towns called Akpata, even with different spelling, exists within the Arogbo area, then, the *Apata* in Ilaje territory of Ugbo kingdom must have been founded by the Ijo migrants (Felix; 2013, Ejoor, 2013, oral information).

For the Ilaje, *Apata -Ilaje* is a portion of land and water within ugbo-Ilaje territory and was founded originally and occupied by an Ilaje fisherman named Odudu whose descendants and kinsmen had been there till date, (Mafimisebi: 2012, Ogbolo: 2012, Omomowo: 2013,oral information). It may be germane to conceptualize the word, *Apata* semantically for historical clarifications.

To the Ilaje, the word *Apata* exists in the Ilaje/ Yoruba vocabulary and is being used in many grammatical variations, such as *apatabirabira*, *apatapiti*, *apatapiri* (being big, marvelous, vast, violent, and gigantic). Omomowo (2013) maintains that, the contentious *Apata* geographically is a vast piece of water in the deep past, inform of a lake or lagoon where the Ilaje people around the area such as *Obe-Ogbaro*, *Ojumole*, *Obe- Erewoye* and *Obe-Adun* used to engage in large scale fishing.

Linguistic evidence shows that what exists in the Ijo vocabulary is *Akpata* and not *Apata* (Uriel: 2013, Peter Ejoor: 2013, oral information). Ejoor in his definition noted that, *Akpata* in Ijo language is something mighty like a hill. On this note, Ojulari (2013) has argued that the Ijo interpretation of *Akpata* both in spelling and definition has no semantic relationship with the area and therefore, cannot copiously explain their claim of the place.

With this backdrop, it is obvious that *Apata-Ilaje* historically has always been a contentious issue mainly as a result of its strategic location coupled with its economic potentials. The contention got to the apex when there was the awareness of the said discovery of oil in the area which made it become a cynosure of people and consequently, a theatre of belligerency. Having tasted the succor from the oil companies on oil spillage and other benefits during this period, both groups, more than ever before became tempted and head-bent on having exclusive possession of the region.

The war, which started on the 19th September 1998 during raining season, caught the Ilaje people unawares. The Ijo are said to have launched a sudden attack at night around 2pm on some Ilaje towns by setting houses ablaze and shooting, killing (looting of property and kidnapping of people, (Erejuwa, 2000:5). The claim of the Ijo for this onslaught was that, the Ilaje destroyed their *Egbesu* shrine (shrine of their god) at *Apata* which has been claimed to be the most traditionally revered place of worship (Aina: 2013, oral interview). The Ilaje on the other hand debunked the claim and viewed it as being cooked up by the Ijo in order to rationalize their keen territorial ambition in the area. They argued that the so called shrine which was made of fresh raffia materials was hurriedly built over night by the Ijo to have a claim of the land which could not be historically substantiated (Erejuwa, 2000:6, Mafimisebi: 2012). For instance, *Apata*, *Obenla*, *Awoye*, *Ilepete*, *Oroto* and *Ilowo* were among the attacked towns. The attack was well planned in such a way that the Ijo soldiers were fully armed in war boats with dynamites, sophisticated guns, spears and cutlasses (Erejuwa, 2000:12).

The result was desertion of many towns in the Ilaje coastal area, leaving behind empty, burnt and bumb-battered houses while people fled in their hundreds to seek asylum elsewhere. Considering the time, nature of attack and the peculiar geographical terrain, the degree of casualties could best be imagined than described. In the reports submitted to the Justice Adebayo Judicial Commission of enquiry into the war, the Ilaje claimed that they lost twenty-five primary schools, three secondary schools, eleven health centres, over fifty petrol stations, one bank (a branch of the United Bank for Africa at Ode-Ugbo) and the electricity and water projects at Ode-Ugbo were claimed to have been vandalized (Erejuwa, 2000: 15). In attempts to scamper for safety in the face of persistent attacks by the Ijo warriors, many people were maimed and many got drowned in the sea owing to overload of boats in which families travelled which could not withstand the swift current and heavy waves of the sea (Erejuwa, 2000:16-17).

With this unfortunate development, some families were entirely wiped out, many people became orphans, widows and widowers (Sunday Tribune, 11 August, 1999: 1, The Punch, 11, August, 1999). In agony, many of the Ugbo-Ilaje fled in all directions to seek refuge. Some fled to their kinsmen in Mahin, Etikan and Aheri land in the west while others fled to Ikaleland in the northern part and others to Lagos and Epe. Sympathizers came to their aid by opening refugee camps for them at Epe and Akodo in Lagos State, Iwopin in Ogun State and Okitipupa in Ondo State. On the 28th September, 1998, in spite of the security troop deployed in the town by the state government, Ode ugbo, the capital of Ugbo-Ilaje was attacked by the Ijo warriors who killed many people, especially children with razing of houses, and the traditional rulers fled for safety. (Ikuesan, 2013: Oral Interview). The Ilaje people however accused the government and the state naval authority of faulty arrangement and perhaps insincerity for appointing an Ijo man the commander of the troop being deployed in Ode- Ugbo during the period (Akintoye, 2013: oral interview).

In addition to the attack of Ode-Ugbo, a total of seventy-six communities were said to have been destroyed in Ugbo kingdom with unascertained number of dead persons (Erejuwa, 2000:11). The only community which remained impregnable and which acted as a bulwark against the Ijo onslaught despite several repeated attacks was Ayetoro.

(Akintoye, 2013 oral interview) This was where the Ilaje converged to repel the Ijo military incursions. With this convergence, the Ilaje were said to have re-organized themselves and planned a full scale war strategy of both indigenous and borrowed skills. At Idiogba/ Ayetoro beach, the Ijo soldiers suffered a disastrous set back in one of their attacks in the hands of the Ilaje soldiers. Thereafter, the Ilaje started launching their counter-attacks which turned out to be more catastrophic. In the first instance, the Ijo camps within Ilaje territory, such as piawe, Legha and Ioro were captured and razed down (Ikuesan, 2013: Oral information). At Ayetoro, Ilaje soldiers were recruited and trained in the use of modern war equipment, such as heavy machine guns, motars, artillery, Walkie-talkies', binoculars, speedboats, halogen lamps which were acquired to reinforce the indigenous equipment as done by the Ijo people.

It should also be noted that war charms (*ayeta* and *agbeta*) and other trado-scientific supports also characterized the preparation. During this period of intensive preparation, Ayetoro became the rallying ground of the Ilaje as Arogbo and Ajapa were for the Ijo. Ayetoro was well fortified with a high military watchtower being erected for a 24hour surveillance with war songs going on every hour. (Akintoye, 2013, Oral interview). Ayetoro was said to be subjected to fifteen series of attacks by the Ijo soldiers with up to ten (10) war boats loaded of soldiers each time, but they were utterly defeated in their last attempt of 28 July, 1999, which marked a turning point in their military campaign (Erejuwa, 2000: 18-24). This was where the Ijo's war charm with the water god's (egbesu) power was totally defused. At the end of the Ayetoro battle, the Ayetoro/Idiogba beach was littered with corps floating in all directions and polluting the water.(Ikuesan, 2012: Oral Interview).

On the 30th July, 1999, following the earlier defeat at Ayetoro beach, the Ilaje rolled out their warboats and engaged the Ijo in a fierce lagoon gun battle at Orotu, a few kilometers east of Ayetoro. In the intensive gun duel which lasted for many hours, the Ijo, who had earlier captured the town (oroto) and built a war camp there were dislodged and driven back to Ajapa, one of their towns (Mobolaji, 2013: Oral Interview). on the 2nd August, 1999, the Ilaje soldiers attacked Ajapa, one of the military strong holds of the Ijo, killed many people including school children, and the town was set ablaze. The Ilaje now built on this strategic military advantage and attacked the Ijo military camp at Obenla junction where the Ijo earlier sacked the Ilaje inhabitants (Ikuesan, 2013: oral interview). After a few days re-capture of Obenla junction, the Ilaje soldiers advanced into some Ijo settlements such as Akpata-Ijo, Opuba, Amatebe, Ozidoghama, Bolowo, sacked the people and razed many houses. (Akintoye, 2013:Oral Interview).

In desperate bid to drive the Ijo out of Ondo state once and for all from 19th - 23rd September, 1999, the Ilaje still advanced their military campaign to Sekelewu near the border between Ondo and Delta state. However, this feat could not be realized owing to the arrival and intervention of the long awaited Federal Government troops on September 24th, 1999. The Federal troops, on arrival immediately took occupation of all strategic locations that served as geographical links between the two belligerent groups (Nigeria Tribune, Wednesday, 25th August, 1999, Punch, Thursday, August, 26, 1999:40).

The success of the Ilaje soldiers in their counter-attacks spelt a great reversal of fortune for the Ijo military troops in many ways. Apart from the heavy casualties earlier sustained at Ayetoro, other subsequent attacks on several Ijo settlements caused devastating result on them to the effect that majority of them fled back home to seek refuge from their kinsmen in various places such as Gbaraun, Bayelsa state, others stopped over at Burutu, Ogbe-Ijo and other communities in Delta state where they became refugees. Throughout August, 1999. Gbaraun witnessed a large number of Arogbo-Ijo refugees in their hundreds and thousands (The Punch, Tuesday August, 17, 1999:6). Many still fled to Okitipupa, Akure and Lagos for safety.

Some Special Dimensions of the War

Usually, wars vary in character and organizational structure as technology, time and ingenuity permit (Fourie, 1996:53). The various dimensions which were, to a large extent related to African indigenous war techniques in this war, were; recruitment strategy, gender factor, trado-medical power and ethnic loyalty.

With the peculiar geographical terrain, the lagoon war, which shares a lot of characteristics with the naval or maritime war, requires adequate courage, swimming skills, skill of paddling, knowledge of local geography such as movement of the tide, water current, shallowness and deepness of places, the weather, knowledge of the water routes, powering and driving of engine boats and so on. Based on these special conditions, recruitment into the army was restrictive and strictly selective (Olumide, 2013, oral interview)

Another dimension of the war was gender factor. Traditionally, among the warring groups, women are not known to be fighting wars. However, in this particular war, though they were not recruited as soldiers, women's role was decisive. While men were fully engaged in field battle, women were in charge of mobility of property and children from the war zones for safety elsewhere (Enikuemehin, 2013, Ajaborowei, 2013, oral information). Another role of the women during the war was supply of food stuff and information to the soldiers. As a matter of tradition in the area, soldiers do not focus much attack on women during wars, hence women enjoy more mobility than men during wars and as such were able to engage in the middle men activities during the war. Though during and after the war, more men were lost, women and children still suffered both psychological and physical casualties. For instance, women with children were reportedly found in canoes loaded of household property along the creeks with emaciated, shocking, repulsive and pitiable appearance (Atikase, 2013: oral interview). With this backdrop, the horrors and dehumanization caused on mothers and children by the war were tremendous.

There was also the ethnic factor which is equally endemic in all Nigerian political affairs. The fact that the Ilaje belong to the larger Yoruba nation and the Arogo-Ijo to the larger Ijo nation externalized the war in such a way that each group was supported by its kinsmen in prosecuting the war. This mainly explains why the war was extended to Bayelsa state, especially in the fishing communities occupied by both the Ijo and Ilaje people, Warri, Sapele and other communities in Delta and Lagos state (The Guardian, Tuesday, September, 14, 1999: 17-18, Nigeria Tribune, Tuesday 5, August, 1999: 1). This ethnic factor would have escalated and compounded the war the more but for the timely intervention of the state governments and some influential individuals. Moreover, recruitment of soldiers took the dimension of nationalism as the Ijo received great military supports from Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta state to prosecute the war while the Ugbo-Ilaje were supported only by their kinsmen in the Ilaje coastal communities since other Yoruba groups are not skillful in naval belligerency, (Eyitemi, 2013: oral interview).

Adoption and application of war charms, such as ayeta (bullet deflector) and agbeta (bullet absorber) were reportedly involved in the war. The efficacy of these charms prompted an Ijo leader to accuse the Ilaje soldiers of using bullet proof boats suspected to have been supplied to them as an aid by their Yoruba kinsmen (Omotere, 2013: oral interview). During the war, the Ijo soldiers were referred to as *egbesu* boys, a name derived from their water god (*egbesu*) from where their spiritual war power is acquired (Ajaborowei 2013: oral interview) while the Ilaje soldiers were called *gwama* boys, a name derived from the Ilaje word, move the vehicle nearer, a commanding word of a leading captain of a troop, meaning, advance (Mobolaji 2013:, oral information). Since after the war, these two names have been adopted as nomenclatures for the two groups. The federal Government sent its peacemaking troops to the area on the 23rd September, 1999 after Ondo state government had failed to control the crisis. What actually agitated the minds of the reasoning Nigerians was that, even when the state government was insensitive towards the resolution of the crisis, why did it take the federal Government so long, about eleven months to deploy military troops in the area for peace making?

Unbelievably, the excuse given by the governments was that, it was difficult to deploy troops in the region because of the difficult terrain (Nigerian tribune, Wednesday, 25 August, 1999: 1). This excuse has actually demonstrated deliberate neglect of the coastal communities by the Nigerian governments over the years even when the bulk of the national and state revenues is derived from the region. Ironically, while the region is a difficult terrain to be protected and developed, it is very easy for the government and its agents to extract the economic resources of the area to their advantage at the expense of the suffering and abnegated people of the area. There is no doubt therefore, that such people who have been confronted by a long period of poverty, abnegation, infrastructural neglect, environmental degradation as well as social discontent would be prone to violence, restiveness and resentment.

In an attempt to resolve the conflict, government set-up a conflict resolution panel and a commission of enquiries. The House of representatives adopted a motion seeking an end to the crisis. The Ondo state government as well as minister of police affairs and its internal affairs personnel visited the warring areas (The Nigerian tribune, Friday, 13 August, 1999: 1, The Guardian, Thursday, August 5, 1999:5, The Punch, Monday August, 20, 1999:3).

This visit and resolution notwithstanding could be called anything but peace and resolution. The greatest expectation of the people was that, the governments and the security apparatus would have got to the root of how private individuals and ethnic warlords had access to sophisticated military weapons used during and even after the war to unleash mayhem on their fellow citizens and with impunity.

The inability of the federal government of Nigeria to suppress the current unabated and barbaric terrorist insurgency of the bokoharam sect in northern Nigeria is a testimony to its administrative ineptitude.

Second, a costly error of non-proper demarcation of boundary committed by the colonial masters remained unrectified by the Nigerian governments and indeed the Ilaje-Ijo war commission of enquires of 1999. As a matter of fact, a major panacea for inter and intra-communal crisis in Nigeria and indeed Africa should be proper boundary demarcation. The failure of the government to proffer permanent solution to the fundamental cause of the crisis strongly reminds us of the failure of the Nigerian governments to secure lives and property of its citizens.

Some Crucial Effects of the War

The social, economic and political effects of the war have been enormous. The war brought about mass migration of the Ilaje to the West and the Ijo to the east thereby creating population congestion as well as other social problems.. In the Ilaje West, such areas like Orioke, Oogoro, Ereke, Eruama, Araromi, Holy centre, Abereke and so on witnessed population explosion with the influx of the war migrants popularly called *bogunde* (war refugees). Other Yoruba areas such as Igbokoda, Okitipupa, Epe, Lagos and Akure also experienced similar development. On the other hand, the deserted areas became lonely and sparsely populated and left with shortage of labour. The Ijo also fled their settlements eastwards to such areas like Sapele, Warri, Burutu, Gbanabiri brass, Foropa, Yenagoa and to some Yoruba towns such as Okitipupa, Ore, Akure and Lagos thereby causing a lot of social problems (Waritobor, 2013: Oral Interview). The war led to loss of lives and property, unemployment, suffering as well as social decadence and restiveness among the youths.

Politically, the original political organization of the people was put on disarray such that traditional rulers and their chiefs fled their domains while towns and villages became deserted, paving the way for warring soldiers to use as war camps. Movement became restricted and most displaced youths became robbers, prostitutes, thugs, beggars as a result of homelessness and unemployment. Moreover, operation of local market as well as other economic activities such as fishing, farming, trading and transportation were at a halt resulting in hunger and despair. Moreover, Children education was adversely affected owing to closure of schools as many schools were set ablaze during the war. (Aina, 2013: Oral Interview).

It is very sad to note that since the end of the war, the area has been turned into a lawless zone in which the youths, especially the ex-soldiers usually organize themselves into gangs of terrors and wayward elements. Kidnapping, assassination, disrespect for elders and constituted authorities, piracy, illicit possession of dangerous weapons and undue use of charms have become rampant. Consequently, the area, which was serene before the war has been facing pandemic security challenges which have been causing social, economic and political chaos and instability since the end of the war.

Conclusion

This study has examined the Ilaje-Ijo war of 1998-99 within the purview of its causes, nature, dimensions and consequences. The study further makes some suggestions on how communal crises could be curbed in Nigerian and indeed African communities. As a measure of curbing out-break of communal crises and youth restiveness, the paper recommends that, there should be; morality sensitization among the youths through public and private initiatives, creation of employment by the governments in order to empower the youths and pre-occupy them economically, stern control measure on the erring youths, strict security measures involving community policing, traditional rulers' involvement and all members of the society, indigenous device of dispute resolution as well as reviving the old indigenous form of child upbringing (collective child upbringing) . In addition, intra and inter ethnic tolerance and respect for one another should be encouraged and imbibed by members of the communities. These would not only settle existing boundary conflicts, but also would prevent further disputes and building of mutual confidence which would promote trans-boundary co-operation.

Though lives and property were lost, economic, social and psychological trauma also characterized the war, some moral lessons were drawn. These include, respect for one another's dignity and fear of provoking further conflict by the two warring groups It should also be noted that some warlords and influential personalities exploited the crisis to enrich themselves. However, the nitty-gritty of the out-break of the war, that is, the *Apata* boundary contention' remains unresolved by the government. This strongly reminds us of an Ilaje saying "abegimade, ebitighonkenokorin" (He who hews a tree half-way has set a deadly trap in the forest).

From the foregoing, it could be concluded that the war has created a monumental damage, persistent mutual suspicion and emotional agony still lingering and capable of provoking further belligerent out-burst in the future.

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