



## Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: Precursor for Inter- Communal Conflict in Bahumono 2006-2016

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### **A b s t r a c t**

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**T**he end of Nigeria Biafra Civil War in 1970 marked the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country. The fratricidal hostilities for the thirty months it lasted open the floodgates to armed conflict and other numerous violent crimes; hitherto unheard of because of volume of arms in circulation. This paper attempts to unravel the effect of small arms and light weapons as a precursor for inter community boundary conflict in Bahumono of the Middle Cross River Region of Nigeria, examine its mode of acquisition, circulation and usage, and also, suggests ways to curb and forestall further preponderance of arms by exploring the various dynamics that had facilitated peaceful communal co- existence, harmonious cohabitation in the past, and provide some current fundamental trends that would foster unity and integration in Bahumono in particular, and Nigeria in general. It is imperative giving the recurring decimal of this act of banditry and its colossal humanitarian consequences. The paper adopts primary and secondary sources of data.

**Keywords:** *Arms Proliferation, Boundary and Inter-Community Conflict*

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## Background to the Study

Communal boundary conflict in the middle Cross River Region have assumed a dreaded pattern of occurrence, resulting to internecine conflagration, wanton destruction of lives and properties, security challenges, as well as vexed syndrome between the communities involved in conflict. Even at the macro level, Cross River State continued to face with challenges of boundary, for instance, Cross River and Ebonyi State (Igbo Ekureku/ Aba-Emege, Adadama/ Amu Ikwo), Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom State, (Ikot Offiong/Oku Iboko); Cross Rivers and Abia State (Ikun/ Okun Ohafia); Cross Rivers and Benue State (Obudu/Tiv), Cross River/Nigeria – Cameroon over Bakassi Peninsular).

Arising from the above, it is imperative to brain-storm in this area of human interaction debacle, and come up with a scholarly suggestion, recommendation, if possible arousal of debate that may bring an end to these carnage and hostilities. In the course of research into this bellicose relationship, it has been unraveled that proliferation of small arms and light weapons in circulation triggered what would have otherwise been classified as low tension into hypertension. Preponderance of light weapons and small arms in possession by unauthorized individuals or groups ignites a little vexed syndrome into skirmish or catastrophe state of affair. The aim of this paper is to examine the acquisition, circulation, usage of illicit arms, and proffer ways to forestall and curb illegal arm transaction.

## Clarification of Concepts

Small Arms and light weapons (SALW), a term used in arms control protocol to refer to two main classes of weapons.

- a. Small Arms: Hand held small caliber firearms, usually consisting of hand guns rifles, shotguns, manual, semi automatic and full automatic weapons and manportable machineguns.
- b. Light Weapons. These includes a wide range of medium caliber and explosive ordnance, including man-portable and vehicle-mounted antipersonnel, antitank and anti-aircraft rocket, missiles, grenade, launchers, rocket launcher motors, hand grenades and rocket propelled grenades (RPGS) etc.

Boundary: A boundary is a line of demarcation which separates one territory from another. Put differently, it is a separating line between one administrative jurisdictions.

Types of Boundaries

**National Boundaries:** these are boundaries drawn to conform with natural physical features such as mountains, Lakes, rivers valleys etc.

**Artificial Boundaries:** These are boundaries drawn deliberately to conform with lines of latitude and longitude.

**Traditional Boundary:** Traditional function usually sees boundary as a mark of separation, divide, interceptor rather than a channel of interaction and routine co-operation.

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<sup>1</sup>Coser, L. *The Function of Social Conflict*: New York, Free Press, 1993

<sup>2</sup>I.R.V. Prescott, *The Evolution of Nigeria's International and Regional Boundaries: 1861-1971*, Vancouver: Trantalus Research Limited, 1971

**The Bridge Concept:** This approach advocates integration and cooperation.

**Boundary Conflict:** As Coser (1968) put it, a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aim of the conflicting parties, are not only to gain the desired, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.<sup>1</sup>

### **Types of Boundary Conflicts**

- a. Territorial Dispute: This is a dispute over a given or specified territory, in which two contending parties or groups laid claim to status. Prescott has identified four main types of boundary disputes (Allot, 1969) these includes:<sup>2</sup>
- b. Positional Dispute: This a boundary dispute over the actual location of the boundary. However, this is the commonest boundary dispute in Nigeria.
- c. Functional Dispute: This is a dispute related to state functions as applied to the boundary. It involves border enforcement regimes carried out by customs and immigration officials. This type of boundary is applied only to international boundaries and border security.
- d. Dispute over Resource Development: This is a territorial dispute initiated with deliberate intent to changing the position of boundary to allow the claimant (s) a share of resources therein.

### **Bahumono in Historical Perspective Origin, Migration and Settlement**

There is no unitary tradition of origin of these minority groups lying in the middle Cross River Valley. Probably because of absence of a centralized political authority over the; or may have forgotten their earliest history due to several waves of dispersal and migration among its people.

Scholars of this extraction, including the Yakurr of the middle Cross River Valley, in reconstructing their history, relate how they migrated north of Cross River as a result of land pressure in "Akpa".<sup>3</sup> The "Akpa" myth came to attract so much attention by scholars who worked on the Cross River region. Scholars like Out Abam Ubi in writing about Yakuur of the middle Cross River (1600-1950) opines that scholars who mentioned "Akpa" in their work suggested that it was probably fugitives from the Jukun of the Benue Valley", after the fall of Wukari empire (2004:43-44) Okoi Arikpo in his part, in his "who are the Nigerians" expanded the "Akpa" hypothesis - that the people of middle V Valley migrated somewhere north of the Cross River Valley in the Benue Valley as a result of land pressure in "Akpa".<sup>4</sup>

Forde, (1964) and Haris, (1965) argued that Bahumono lived first in the hilly country to south of Cross River (Possibly in region of Oban Hills and Awai Hills) together with

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<sup>3</sup>Ubi, O.A. "The Yakurr: A Reconstruction of Pre. Colonial History" Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Lagos, Lagos 1981 p.31-32

<sup>4</sup>Arikpo, Okoi. "Who are the Nigerians"? 1957 Lugard Lectures, Lagos, 1958 p.14

<sup>5</sup>Ifemesia, C.C. *The Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo. An Historical Perspective*. Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, Enugu 1978. p.6

<sup>6</sup>Asiwaju, A.I "Inaugural Lectures based on Africa's Colonial Boundaries" Artificial Boundaries, Lagos: University of Lagos press, 1989. P 161-16

people of Yakurr, Ikom, Abayongo and Ekoma. Bahumono is located on the eastern side of the middle Cross River basin, about 129 kilometers away from Calabar and 54 kilometers from the Obubra. It lies between latitude 5.40°N and Longitude 8.3°E, with land area of approximately to square miles (about 1.422 square kilometers). An estimated population of 68,000 people in 2006 (NPC).

Linguistic evidence dismissed the claim by some scholars that Bahumono is an Igbo-subgroup. Ifemesia deposit that they are sometimes classified as 'West Sudanic, and other times, as semi-Bantoid Ifemesia<sup>5</sup>, located in the present day ABI Local Government of Cross River State, with acronym 'B' that makes up ABI. Bahumono comprised of seven autonomous traditional villages of Afafanyi, Anong Bazohure, Ebijakara, Ebom, Ediba and Usumutong. However, they exist several other autonomous new villages, following the recent creation of towns and villages by the Cross River State.

### **Theories of Boundary**

There are two contending theoretical approaches to the study of boundaries, these are: State-Centric Perspective and Grass Root Perspective. State-Centric: This approach deals with relationship between states or studies in international relations and diplomacy. This approach does not consider divided and related groups since it emphasized on traditional barrier function of boundaries. Example, Nigeria/ Cameroon border, Israel and Palestine. The Grassroots Level of Analysis focuses on the coherent cultural area that has divided related groups, and the impact of boundaries on their daily lives, including boundary conflict. This approach has been adopted in this paper. Asiwaju, A.I and Bonchuck, O.M are among the major exponent of this theory. In their views, boundary should be an integrator rather than a bisector.<sup>6</sup>

### **Philosophical Nexus between Arms Proliferation and Boundary Conflicts**

According to Hon. Justice S.A. Obi (Rtd) commission of inquiring into Ebom/Ebijakara boundary conflicts report submitted to the Governor of Cross River State. Unequivocally collaborated by the Divisioner Police Officer for Abi Local Government Area. Tobias Chukwuma (DSP) in his testimony on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 2006 before the commission during which he also stated that three persons had been arrested with the supply of dynamites used during hostilities. For the case of reference, that portion of evidence read thus:<sup>7</sup>

On the 15 of January, 2006 being Sunday, the commander of Mobile Police Squadron from Calabar stationed at the scene met me at about 6.30am to inform me that Ebom community had besieged Ebijakara. That they had to withdraw because of the weaponry used; that they used military weapons and dynamites. I left to the scene and saw actually that many houses in Ebijakara had been destroyed and informed the commissioner of Police and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) who had taken over the investigation on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, 2006 "I had not seen Ebijakara house burnt. I met some who were the suppliers of the dynamites."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Hostilities Between Ebom and Ebijakara Communities in Abi Local Government Area. Volume I, May, 2006. Submitted to the Governor of Cross River State, Mr. Donald Duke

<sup>8</sup>Rotimi T. Suberu, *Ethnic Minority Conflict and Governance in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books limited Ibadan 1996 p.41

<sup>9</sup>The Nordic Africa Institute, 1996. p 412-9

They were three in number. They were handed over to the state CID for interrogation". The testimony of the Divisional Police Officer of Abi L.G.A (DSP) Tobias Chukwuma has aptly confirmed the use of military weapons amongst the civilian population in minor skirmishes. It was also been revealed through oral interview, discussion at individual based and focused group based that AK-47 aka Automatic by Kalashnikov was the commonly used assault rifle in communal conflicts. It has been suggested that about 50 to 70 Ak-70 rifles are in possession of individuals or groups in each community around the Middle Cross River region.

### **Why Small Arms and Light Weapons Everywhere?**

There are official as well as illegal importation of arms and light weapons in Nigeria and the sub-region. This includes various government need and licensed private operators. Furthermore, it is worthy to note that many countries in Africa are currently facing one arm insurrection or the other. This flash point includes Egypt, Central African Republic (CAR) South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Nigeria inclusive. Illegal importation of arms and ammunitions also exist in Nigeria, for instance, there had been several reports that small arms and light weapons had been exchanged with crude oil in the Niger Delta especially before the presidential amnesty in 2009.

They had been security reports that save Nigerian Mercenaries trained by Muamar Gaddafi former Libyan strongman returned to the country with large cache of arms and light weapons. Influx of terrorist/Islamic fundamentalists from Middle East and Arab world into West Africa due to their man hunt by US and Europe, asserts African Nomadic institute.<sup>9</sup>

Researchers have shown that the uncontrolled ubiquitous small arms and light weapons exacerbate feuds, local wars, and human right abuses crime and social unrest in Nigeria and other part of West African sub-region. Insurgency in the North-East of Nigeria equally account for ubiquity of this arms and weapons. There are relatively cheap and affordable by a common man.

### **How Weapons are Trafficked and Circulated**

According to News World Magazine of 26 May, 2014. Quoted the former Controller General of the Nigeria Immigration, as having disclosed that the nation has 1,400 illegal border posts across the country, the nation porous borders on both land and sea allow gun smuggling from neighbouring countries. It has also been revealed that illegal arms dealers from both Africa and Europe supply (SALW)<sup>10</sup> small arms and light weapons to Niger Delta region and are paid with proceeds of stolen crude oil. "Nigeria has more weapons at the disposal of the people than food"; said Hon. Nnenna Ukaeje, House Committee Chairman on Foreign Affairs. Artisans' fire arms known as (*Awka*) locally made further

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<sup>9</sup>News World Magazine, May 26,2014 p. 54

<sup>11</sup>Being an extract from the quotation of News Magazine of May, 2014, Justice Okechukwu Okeke of the Federal High Court, Lagos sentenced an Iranian Azim Aghajani and his Nigeria Counterpart, Ali Jega to 17 years imprisonment for their involvement in the importation of arms.

<sup>12</sup>Justice S. A. Obi "Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Hostilities Between Ebom and Ebijakara Community" in Abi Local Government Area, vol. 1, May 2006, 2-58.



expanded the circulation. Blacksmiths play vital role in the manufacture and circulation of firearms in Nigeria. Flash points areas like Libya, Syria, Iraq, Oman and the likes, where weapons are easily exchanged for grains or food stuff; are smuggled through the porous borders into Northern Nigeria<sup>11</sup>. The shipment believed to have originated from, Iran came 13 containers loaded with arms and ammunition in the disguise of building materials. The arms include Assorted Calibers of motors, 107mm rockets and shell 23mm anti-aircraft guns.

### **Causes of the Conflict**

Causes of Ebom-Ebijakara boundary conflict are pluralistic in nature and multidimensional in character, following the plethora of memoranda submitted by both communities of Ebom and Ebijakara, and evidence of all their witnesses that testify before Justice S.A. Obi Commission. The Commission identified remote and immediate causes of the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

### **Remote Causes**

Historically speaking, the Ebom and Ebijakara Communities have co-existed for a period spanning over two centuries. Indeed there is no discernible or clear cut boundary between the two communities. The commission found in the course of its inquiry that there exist a deep-seated discontentment, mutual suspicion and hatred occasioned by the natural competing ends of mankind.

### **Land Ownership Tussle**

The lingering tussle over ownership of land known as *Rehot Ina Abasi/Rehot Obazi Inah* which both communities laid claim to status. The piece of land lying between the two communities had been source of conflict between Ebom and Ebijakara which each laying claim to its ownership. According to the Commission, the piece of land was jointly donated by both communities for developmental purposes in the 1970s. sometimes in February and March 2005, when the National population Commission carried out its enumeration/area demarcation in Abi Local Government Area, preparatory to 2006 Census exercise, the disputed area of land was allegedly suspected by the Ebijakara community to have been demarcated in favour of the Ebom Community. This tended to escalate into violence, but with the timely intervention of the then chairman of Abi L.G.A Hon. Eko Atu who informed the both communities that the disputed area had been treated as independent Enumeration Area (IEA).

### **Claims and Counter Claim to Land Lordship**

#### **Vis-avis Tenantship in the Area**

Claims and counter claims of autochthony and 'settler'. That is 'Indigene (Landlord) and/or Settler' (tenant in the area. In the course of investigation, it was found that whereas the Ebon Community referred to the Ebijakara as settlers and Ebijaka on the same hand, referred to the Ebom Community as settlers. Both communities claimed to the landship status of the area. These irresolvable riddles of claim and counter claim remain subject of imbroglio on both communities as a distractive impasse.

### **Political Marginalization**

Political Marginalization is a contributory factor to the hostilities and fratricidal killings. Ebom and Ebijakara share the same Council ward-Ebom-Ebijakara council Ward in Abi local Government Area of Cross River State. The demographic suppression and politics of 'majority rule no minority' interest led the weeping child out of its mother's breast. Again, it was also revealed that at the 2004 general election, a candidate from Ebijakara community contested for House of Representative seat for Yakurr and Abi, Under the platform of All Progressive people's Party (ANPP). It believed that he lost to the candidate from Yakurr under the Platform of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) due to non support from the Ebom Community.

### **Road Construction by Ebom Community**

The Ebom Community via the assistance from the Cross River State poverty Reduction Agency, constructed a new road leading to the beach in the area. This, perhaps as a commercial nerve centre, and a link between Ebom and Ebijaka in Cross River and Ndibe in Ebonyi State, was construed by Ebijakar Community as economic sabotage.

### **Administrative and/or Bureaucratic Bottlenecks**

The delay in judicial proceedings government decision as one of the remote causes and 1964 when Supreme Court judgment on land ownership claim between Ebom and Ebijakara Communities was last delivered, there had been series of decision reached by the court at various levels, but without any follow-up action to permanently create the required established boundary, respecting the demarcation of disputed land for which judgment had been delivered.

The Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgment of 1964 had been left unexecuted as no practical action had been taken to establish the precise boundary lines contiguous to the land adjudged by the Supreme Court to the Ebom land. The said disputed land had been lying between the present settlement of Ebom and Ebijakara Communities and containing a portion that accommodate the Local Government Health Centre and the Assemblies of God Church serving both communities, had remained the boiling point of controversy till date between the affected communities.

### **Application of Latent Forces**

Ritual killings and application of latent forces were traceable to both communities. Both communities admitted to the commission of reliance to fetish means via use of oracle, juju and other barbaric means. The commission found during its visits to the scene of hostilities, a shrine on the side of Ebijakara community where headless corpses were equally seen. Immediate Causes: Fracas between Charity Obi Ekpe of Ebijakara and her boyfriend from Ebom became communized and degenerated into fratricidal conflict. Youth reprisal activities of 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2006 there were attacks and counter- attacks by the youth of both communities which resulted into full scale hostilities of 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2006.

### **Impact of Ebom - Ebijakara Conflict**

The effect of the Ebom-Ebijakara conflict was multidimensional, and cut across social, economic, political and cultural spheres of these communities.

**Social:** The conflict caused the closure of schools in Ebom and Ebijakara, a total of 420 people lost their lives and all Ebijakara buildings destroyed. Also, intermarriages between Ebom - Ebijakara do not exist at the moment, even those that married before the fracas, there exist some suspicion and lack of trust for espionage activities. There was closure of schools from both communities.

**Economic:** All economic activities including trading, boat fairing, sand mining, cyclist and agriculture were totally halted for fear of being kidnapped, abduction or even killed. The both communities traded with caution. The conflict resulted in closure of Ndibe beach road, the most viable trade route linking Cross River and Ebonyi State.

Politically, during electioneering campaign, neither Ebom nor Ebijakara could visit either communities. Secondly, during councillorship election Ebijakara could not vie for position due to demographic disadvantage.

#### **Number of Live Lost in Ebijakara Community**

Base on the findings, both on and sources and commission of inquiry sources, the reprisal attack by Ebom Community on Ebijakara Community which was carried out on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 2006 was even more devastating and claimed several lives as reported by Ebijakara Community who alleged they recorded 134 casualties between 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> January 2006, while some were confirmed death, some corpses were seen, and some declared missing till date, some Ebijaka people who were back to retrieve their properties were reported never to have returned or been seen till date.

A total of 420 people lost their lives in the both communities.

#### **Number of Lives Lost in Ebom Community**

The commission put the death toll in Ebom Community at 34 including male, female and children. The assessment of casualties figure was form the memoranda submitted to justice Obi led commission of inquiry, as it thus read from the commission's report to the Governor of Cross River State, His Excellency (Gov) Donald Duke

#### **Conclusion**

The crisis from the research findings began in 1911 when the Colonialist demarcated the boundary between Ebon and Ebijakara Communities. From then now, subsequent Federal Government have not been able to resolve this dispute, resulting into outburst of hostilities that attracted concern both in Nigeria and outside, for the first time in Nigeria history, that inter-community conflict could degenerate into war of attrition and annihilation. Total cleansing and expelling of Ebijakara Community from their home town, total destruction of lives and property Ebijakara.

Apparently, surprising, Ebom and Ebijakara have cohabited, share common affinities, language and cultural homogeneity, and common descend, even before the demarcation of boundary by Falk in 1913. Critical examination into the missing link between these two communities showed that politics more than economics and social remain the area of jangling discords, and germinated into fig tree of hate syndrome, vexed state of affairs, and



deep seated discontentment. The Cross River State Government should as a matter of urgent security concern, resettle and rehabilitate Ebijakara Community who still at large Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) taking refuge in Usumutong and other villages around Abi Local Government Area. Political elites at all times should refrain from dragging their communities into pursuing their inordinate ambition and selfish ends at the expense of other people's lives and properties. Lastly, no community development takes place in an atmosphere insecurity, rancour and acrimony. This was crystal clear as construction of road via Ebom-Ebijakara was abandoned.

### **Recommendation**

The issue of indigenes versus 'Settlers'

Findings reveals that the issue of 'indigenes' versus 'settler's', or 'host' versus 'stranger' is fast becoming a potent threat to Nigeria's co existence as a polity. How could one who have lived for a particular area, lived all their lives in a particular region for over three countries be referred or regarded as a stranger. It is an aberration in such use of semantics. The Federal Government of Nigeria should address this menace constitutionally, on the question of citizenship.

This is a sad development that if not quickly addressed could tear the fabric of the Nigerian State, as succinctly deposited by a scholar:

Federal character and quota system know the face of the indigene. They do not know the face citizen. It is one of the contradictions of the Nigerian situation.

Furthermore;

Effort towards nation building need to be propped up through legislation and people orientated programme aimed at reducing or narrowing friction between groups and ensuring that all citizens have equal right as well as equal opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

Former FCT Commissioner of Police and an Abuja based security consultant Laurence Alobi has advocated closure of all nation's borders and their proper policing as a way out in curbing illegal entrance of arms and ammunition into the country. News World further advised that Nigerians should be vigilant and alert security agencies on the existence of illegal arm around them. Furthermore, security agencies should set up their intelligence gathering drag not to meet with the challenges of the day. It is further revealed that corruption among the public officials central the ubiquitous guns in the country, as most security operatives' guns import into country. Politicians provide their followers with arms and ammunitions in making sure election, are won at all cost, of which after election, this arms are hardly retrieved back.

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<sup>13</sup> Sa'ad Abubakar "The Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria, Which Way Forward? The 2002 Dike Memorial Lectures,op cit. p.8

1. Expert blame lack of arm control legislation, enforcement, porous borders, and sub-regional states for inaction.

### **Historical Consciousness**

As indicated in the findings, the Federal Government should introduce 'History' as a compulsory subject of study from primary to secondary schools, and even up to the tertiary institution as general studies. If the citizens are historically conscious, some of the historical fallacies of the past would not repeat itself. Claude Ake gave a clearest analysis on this:

*The study of man, social man, must have a temporal dimension. If a social is to be understood as a phenomenon in process through time, in short, historically. Again --- so susceptible to change and appear to lack the uniformity of physical objects and to develop in an autonomous manner --- options for 'generalizing' then are severely limited.<sup>14</sup>*

According to Ake, the social science cannot accomplish the task of providing systematic explanation of the social world without operating with the framework of historical analysis. In effect, historical mindedness is the very first step towards conflict resolution. History in all sense is generic.

1. National Boundary Commission should as a matter of urgency commence appropriate demarcation of disputed boundary area within Nigeria.
2. As a matter of urgent security concern, the Federal Government should immediately without further delay commence disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, rehabilitation and resettlement of conflicting parties communities and individuals who are victim of armed resurgence.
3. Demarcation of boundary area should be done along side with the production of the boundary map of the area.
4. Prolong litigations should be discouraged by the government in boundary related matters example of this prolonged litigation was seen in the case of Ebom and Ebijakara 1913, 1917, 1927, 1964 and 2013. It took the government over a century, to resolve a land dispute that culminated into war of attrition and 'annihilation'; one hundred years later still far from resolution.
5. Requires sub-regional synergies, cooperation and security
6. ity collaboration, to curb the menace of illicit arm trafficking.

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<sup>14</sup>Ake, C. *Political Economy of Africa*. London, Longman, 1981. p. 218