AFRICA DEVELOPMENT AFRIQUE ET DEVELOPPEMENT

Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009

Special Issue on Legacies of Biafra: Violence, Identity and Citizenship in Nigeria

Guest Editors: Ike Okonta and Kate Meagher

AFRICA DEVELOPMENT
AFRIQUE ET DÉVELOPPEMENT

Typeset by Sériane Ajavon
Cover designed by Aissa Djonne
Printed by Imprimerie Saint-Paul, Dakar, Senegal

AFRICA DEVELOPMENT
AFRIQUE ET DEVELOPPEMENT
Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009

A Quarterly Journal of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa

Revue trimestrielle du Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique

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CODESRIA would like to express its gratitude to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA/SAREC), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), the French Ministry of Cooperation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Foundation, FINIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), IIEP/ADEA, OECD, IFS, OXFAM America, UN/UNICEF, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and the Government of Senegal for supporting its research, training and publication programmes.

Le CODESRIA exprime sa profonde gratitude à la Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA/SAREC), au Centre de Recherche pour le Développement International (CRDI), à la Ford Foundation, à la Fondation MacArthur, à la Carnegie Corporation, à l'Agence Norvégienne de Développement et de Coopération (NORAD), à l'Agence Danoise pour le Développement International (DANIDA), au Ministère Français de la Coopération, au Programme des Nations-Unies pour le Développement (PNUD), au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères des Pays-Bas, à la Fondation Rockefeller, à FINIDA, CIDA, IIEP/ADEA, à l'OCDE, à Oxfam America, à l'UNICEF, à la Fondation pour le renforcement des capacités en Afrique (ACBF) ainsi qu'au Gouvernement du Sénégal pour le soutien apporté aux programmes de recherche, de formation et de publication du Conseil.

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Africa Development / Afrique et Développement
CODESRIA, Av. Cheikh Anta Diop x Canal IV B.P. 3304, Dakar, 18524 Sénégal.
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ISSN 0850-3907

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(ISSN 0850-3907)

Legacies of Biafra: Violence, Identity and Citizenship in Nigeria

Introduction

Ike Okonta*
Kate Meagher**

Nearly forty years after the event, the Nigerian Civil War still conjures up powerful political images, within as well as outside Africa. Internationally, the 'Biafran War', as it was called, recalls accounts of ethnic conflict, starving children, and humanitarian intervention. Within Africa, it resonates with the devastating consequences of failed nationalism, but also with a tenacious demand for genuine citizenship and self-determination. In many ways, these images have remained as divergent as they are relevant to contemporary understandings of Africa. As a growing number of African countries have succumbed to civil war and foreign intervention, it is a good time to reflect on what was learned from the Biafran conflict, and what was left unaddressed to trouble the fortunes of future generations.

The following collection of articles represents an interrogation of the contemporary legacies of the Biafran experience. They explore how the fault lines of the Nigerian Civil War have continued to shape political trajectories in Nigeria and in Africa more broadly. In many ways, the Biafran War was not just a Nigerian civil conflict; it was a resounding challenge to the dreams of African nationhood, sending out tremors that echoed not just across Africa, but around the world. The unsatisfactory resolution of issues of identity, citizenship, and democracy that arose from that conflict continues to reverberate in contemporary struggles in Nigeria and beyond.

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Reassessing the Legacies of Biafra

Within Nigeria, the Civil War and the dream of Biafran nationalism continues to haunt contemporary processes of state-building. While Biafra lost the Civil War, the conflict reshaped the political and economic character of Nigeria, intensifying the salience of ethnicity in the political process, with profound implications for emerging institutions of resource control, citizenship, and the prospect of democracy. The new institutional arrangements that emerged in response to the war tended to mask the problems of Nigerian statecraft rather than solve them. The fallout from the war continues to influence the development of Nigerian institutions of governance and resource control, while failing to address smouldering grievances among the Igbo and the southern minorities of the Niger Delta. Over the years, an authoritarian and often negligent state has been met by ongoing challenges to its legitimacy. At the same time, patterns of migration, trade, and civil organization have generated countervailing forces at the popular level, giving rise to a resilient social fabric that has, so far, managed to weather violent challenges to Nigerian statehood. But, amid the intense economic pressures and mounting identity-based political mobilization since the 1990s, cracks are beginning to show…

At the regional and international levels, the Biafran War catalyzed new forms of international intervention motivated by humanitarian crisis as well as by colonial politics and oil interests. The response of the global community was shaped by international rivalries and political agendas as much as by humanitarian concern – the latter often driven more by voters, churches, and corporate interests than by states. Global famine relief efforts for Africa and Médecins sans Frontières were both enduring products of the Biafran conflict. Similar issues of humanitarian crisis, oil, and geopolitics are resurgent in contemporary crises in the Niger Delta, and in the wider regional crisis in Darfur. In short, Biafra, the Civil War, and their aftermath speak to the continuing problems of statehood in Africa: the precarious balance between ethnic identities and national polities, the extractive and authoritarian political culture on the continent, and the concerned but often disruptive humanitarian intrusions into sovereignty and political process.

Reflecting on Biafra and its consequences is not only of scholarly interest; it is also a timely contribution to current events. The botched 2007 Nigerian election has raised serious questions about the problems of democracy, not only in Nigeria, but in Africa more widely. Mounting violence in the Niger Delta continues to alarm and frustrate the international community, drawing attention to ongoing problems of identity, oil, and separatist militias in southeastern Nigeria. As we near the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Biafran

War, and the fiftieth anniversary of Nigerian independence, it seems appropriate to consider the legacies of this iconic conflict for political developments in contemporary Africa.

The first two articles, by Ukoha Ukiwo and Kate Meagher, challenge the perception that civil conflict in Africa is a product of ethnic diversity and weak states. In the period since the Biafran War, they explore how state violence rather than popular divisions has contributed to eroding national cohesion from above, while, paradoxically, ethnic diversity and informal institutions have contributed to knitting it together from below. A second pair of articles, by Kathryn Nwajiaku and Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, investigates how Biafra has shaped contemporary challenges to the state, from sub-national minorities in the Niger Delta to international assertions of the 'responsibility to protect'. Together, these four articles highlight three broad themes: the role of violence in nation-building; the reimagining of Biafra in ethnic struggles since the 1990s; and the implications of the Biafran conflict for notions of citizenship in contemporary Africa.

This collection of articles takes up the challenge of assessing the Biafran legacy, with a view to addressing silences and grappling with the underlying challenges. More by happenstance than by design, the contributions presented here are dominated by Igbo perspectives on the war, sometimes self-consciously so. The workshop that originally gave rise to these papers involved academics from across Nigeria and beyond, but intervening commitments determined the final selection of articles. That said, these papers are very much the product of critical discussions and comments that took place in that forum, and explore the implications of the war in ways that resonate with perceptions of other Nigerians as well as non-Nigerians.

Violence, Identity, and Citizenship

A strong theme running through most of these articles involves a challenge to the notion that ethnic identity is a key source of violence in African societies. Explanations of the rising tide of civil war and violence in Africa have routinely focused on 'ancient tribal hatreds' (Kaplan 1994) or the inherent fragility of multi-ethnic African states (Young 2004). Ukiwo disputes this type of explanation by tracing how primary ethnic allegiances are a product of violent forms of statecraft, rather than the other way around. He shows, along with most of the other contributions, that the Igbo were the ethnic group with the highest commitment to federalism in Nigeria before the Civil War, detailing how state violence, through acts of omission as much as commission, has embedded ethnic and religious divisions across Nigerian society, with a particularly negative effect on the sense of national belonging among the Igbo.

Starting from the opposite side of the question, contributions by Meagher and Nwajiaku focus on the integrative role of popular identities amid the divisive pressures of state violence. References are made to marriage and trade across battle lines during the Civil War, and to the important role of identity in knitting Nigerian society together through migration, economic interdependence, and political mobilization. Nwajiaku highlights how the pressures of minority status and the Civil War galvanized numerous groups in the Niger Delta into an overaching Ijaw identity. Meagher emphasizes the role of Igbo identity and economic informalization in creating inter-ethnic frameworks of cohesion within Nigerian society, contrary to the conventional assumption that identity and informalization erode national cohesion from below. However, both contributions support Ukiwo's contention that state involvement or complicity in mounting violence in the Niger Delta and in Shari'a-related riots, are beginning to destroy the integrative dimensions of identity, making Nigerian society increasingly vulnerable to the identity-based fractures that precipitated the Civil War. Similar patterns of popular cohesion and political violence are evident in a number of other African societies – in Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone – to the extent that international organizations are now turning to indigenous institutions rather than political nationalism as mechanisms of conflict resolution (ECA 2007; Jutting et al. 2007).

Turning to the second theme, these articles trace the changing meanings of Biafra within Nigerian society and beyond. Born of a commitment to federalism, rather than from a desire for separatism, Biafra did not begin as a bid for identity politics, but as a call for a more just and inclusive nationalism. This icon of disillusioned nationalism has given Biafra a resonance that has not only inspired the formation of contemporary organizations of frustrated Igbo youth, such as MASSOB, but has developed cross-ethnic appeal as a rallying symbol for Ijaw nationalist struggles in the Niger Delta. Nwajiaku's article shows that this is the more surprising since the Ijaw identified with the Federal side in the original Civil War, but are now actively reimagining themselves as champions of the Biafran cause.

The contribution by Pérouse de Montclos considers the ways in which Biafra has been reimagined in the international community. As Africa becomes the centre of humanitarian efforts, Biafra continues to symbolize the legitimacy of these endeavours – the protection of persecuted peoples from starvation and genocide – despite the fact that contemporary African conflicts are considerably more complex than these simple Biafran narratives can accommodate. In contemporary situations where the perpetrators of genocide may be among the refugees, and supplies may be assisting violent militias rather than defending armies, the Biafran imaginary is mobilized to gloss

over the contradictions and depoliticize the intervention, much as it was in the time of the original Biafran conflict, when the tangle of international economic, political, and religious interests was cloaked in a benevolent 'responsibility to protect'.

Both Ukiwo and Nwajiaku also highlight the generational issues embedded in the contemporary reimagining of Biafra. While Biafra was very much a product of elite politics in the 1960s, it has been reappropriated since the 1990s as a symbol of subaltern politics. Ukiwo points out that popular organizations espousing the revival of Biafra were not championed by Igbo elites, or even by Ojukwu himself. Instead, Biafra has been appropriated by Igbo diaspora groups in the US and disaffected Igbo and Delta youth, disillusioned with the corruption and cliental pacts of their elites, and impatient with the failures of military rule, democracy and neo-liberal reforms to deliver inclusive forms of citizenship. By appropriating the trappings of statehood from the original Biafra – the flag, the currency, even an embassy – these relatively marginalized groups have acquired a symbolic power and prominence above their political weight, enhancing the visibility as well as the threat of their message of democratic disappointment.

The final theme touches on the issues of citizenship. The legacies of Biafra speak of the failure of the Nigerian state to address popular demands for a more just and equitable form of citizenship. As these articles show, it is a failure that has reverberated in the form of ethnic discord and civil conflict, not only in Nigeria, but in societies across Africa. In the globalized circumstances of contemporary African struggles, however, demands for greater citizenship rights are as likely to bypass as to discipline the state. International involvement, through humanitarian organizations and human rights NGOs, has changed the equation through which demands for citizenship influence governance and state-building. As Pérouse de Montclos points out, rebel movements that mobilize international sympathy and assistance are increasingly able to punch above their weight. In some cases, this may prolong conflict and increase, rather than ease, the suffering of excluded populations. Worse still, as hinted at in the contributions of Ukiwo and Pérouse de Montclos, excessive international intervention, even with the best of intentions, poses a threat to sovereignty, weakening the institutions and political confidence necessary to the emergence of genuine citizenship.

Moreover, as the original Biafran conflict revealed, diasporas play an important role in shaping notions of citizenship. Biafra was a creation of the Igbo diaspora in other regions of Nigeria, and the Igbo diaspora in the US and UK have played a key role in the contemporary revival of the Biafran cause. In an era in which remittances outstrip foreign aid by nearly two to

one, diasporas have become increasingly important in shaping, and funding, new ideas of citizenship and democracy (IFAD 2007; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002). As in the original Biafran conflict, and the contemporary reawakenings of the Biafran idea, it is important to attend to both the disruptive as well as the constructive potential of diaspora involvement in contemporary processes of state-building and citizenship in Africa.

Reimagining Biafra: Looking Backward or Forward?

The timeliness of considering the implications of Biafra for contemporary Nigerian nationhood is reflected in recent offerings of the Nigerian video film industry, affectionately known as Nollywood (Haynes 2006; Chukwuma Okoye 2007). While still a highly sensitive subject (prompting government intervention in the title of one of the films), Nollywood films have begun to explore the issue of Biafra and its legacies since the democratic opening in 1999 (Haynes 2006:529). The first Nollywood film on the Civil War, *The Battle of Love*, which came out in 2000, was made by the Yoruba director Simi Opeoluwa. It tells the tale of an inter-ethnic Igbo–Hausa couple, uprooted from the North by the war, and attempting to flee to Biafra for safety. A second film, *Laraba*, made by the Igbo director Ndubuisi Okoh about the contemporary legacies of the war, continues the theme of an Igbo–Hausa couple living in the North, whose love is thwarted by parental opposition and ethnic violence, leading to a tragic Romeo and Juliet conclusion.

Despite the varied ethnic backgrounds of the directors, both films reimagine Biafra in similar ways: as a symbol of social dislocation and unnatural estrangement (Okoye 2007:8). This is particularly interesting, given current debates being carried out on the internet by the Nigerian diaspora on whether the Igbo have hijacked Nollywood and usurped global representations of Nigeria with their largely English-medium films (Naijarules 2008; see also Nyamnjoh 2008 on global struggles of representation in the Nigerian film industry). Nollywood takes up the Biafran theme in ways that not only challenge these ethnically factionalized debates from the diaspora, but raise new questions about who imagines national community in the post-colonial era. Contrary to Benedict Anderson's (1991) classic book, *Imagined Communities*, and Jean-Francois Bayart's (1996) more controversial work, *L'Illusion identitaire*, nationhood is seen neither as an elite project nor as an illusion, but as a popular longing disrupted by elite conflicts and mobilized violence. While the heroes, and in some cases the villains, of these films ultimately choose national solidarity rather than sides, there is a growing sense of foreboding that the space for national unity is being irrevocably eroded by mounting violence. Although Nollywood envisions Biafra and its

legacies in terms of a popular commitment to unity over political and ethnic divisions, staying together involves torture, flight, and even suicide.

What is clear is that, forty years on, Biafra still has a lot to say about the struggles of citizenship and statehood in Africa. As a cautionary tale, as a symbol of democratic longing, as a rallying point for the disaffected, or a justification for foreign intervention, Biafra stands as a reminder of failure and resilience, of lessons learned and unlearned. In the quest for African solutions to African problems, interrogating the legacies of Biafra offers a useful place to start.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 9–30

(ISSN 0850-3907)

Violence, Identity Mobilization and the Reimagining of Biafra

Ukoha Ukiwo*

Abstract

The events leading to the Nigeria Civil War marked the triumph of force and violence over dialogue and negotiation as a means of conflict resolution. The success of the Nigerian state in imposing a military solution on the preceding political crisis, and then suppressing the ensuing Biafran rebellion, has had a lasting effect on state–society relations. As a result, the state has not refrained from using violence at the slightest provocation against competing and conflicting ethno-religious groups. The tendency of the state to exercise domination through the deployment of violence implies an ongoing crisis of state hegemony rather than a resolution of civil unrest. This article argues that state violence was more important than ethnic divisions in triggering the secessionist attempt of Biafra, and has continued to create rather than resolve ethnic divisions across the country. The emergence in post-Civil War Nigeria of regimes that perpetrated or permitted mass violence against restive social groups remains critical to understanding the contemporary rise of ethno-nationalist movements and waning allegiance to the Nigerian state, particularly among the Igbo. The aim of the article is to underscore the understated salience of state violence in the debates on identity and citizenship in multi-ethnic societies.

Résumé

Les événements qui ont conduit à la guerre civile au Nigéria ont marqué le triomphe de la force et de la violence sur le dialogue et la négociation comme moyen de résolution des conflits. Le succès de l'État nigérian dans l'imposition d'une solution militaire à la précédente crise politique, puis dans la répression de la rébellion Biafra, a eu un effet durable sur les relations entre l'État et la société. En conséquence, l'État n'a pas renoncé à utiliser la violence contre les

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groupes ethno-religieux concurrents et conflictuels, à la moindre provocation. La tendance de l'État à exercer la domination par le déploiement de la violence implique une crise continue de l'hégémonie de l'État plutôt qu'une résolution de troubles civils. Cet article soutient que la violence d'Etat était plus importante que les divisions ethniques dans le déclenchement de la tentative de sécession du Biafra, et a continué à créer, plutôt que de résoudre, les divisions ethniques dans tout le pays. L'émergence dans le Nigeria de l'après-guerre civile de régimes qui ont perpétré ou autorisé la violence de masse contre des groupes sociaux agités demeure un facteur essentiel pour la compréhension de la montée contemporaine de mouvements nationalistes ethniques et du déclin de l'allégeance à l'État nigérian, en particulier chez les Igbo. L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en exergue l'importance sous-estimée de la violence d'État dans les débats sur l'identité et la citoyenneté dans les sociétés multiethniques.

Introduction

The ghosts of Biafra have wittingly or unwittingly been invoked in commentaries on contemporary manifestations of violence in Nigeria in three ways. Firstly, the bloody Nigeria Civil War is blamed for engendering a socio-political setting in which violence is normalized, embedding a 'culture of violence' in Nigerian society. By smashing the culture of peaceful conflict resolution, Biafra was said to have set in motion a process of militarization, in which violence is not only condoned but also celebrated and institutionalized as an instrument of statecraft. As Pius Okigbo puts it:

> War time leads to a degradation of moral values. It upgrades patriotism, heroism, valour, but it degrades the moral code, excuses excesses of sadistic behavior, especially if these excesses are visited on the so-called enemy. Long after hostilities cease, it is often difficult to re-inculcate the normal moral code in the people. Nigeria has seen this experience which has debased public life and service (cited in Agbaje 2002:28).

The second way in which Biafra is implicated in contemporary violence in Nigeria is that it marked a watershed in the dissemination of small arms and light weapons among the populace (Hazen 2007). The war not only led to massive importation of arms and ammunition into the country but to the emergence and growth of a local arms industry, particularly in the south-east. Decommissioned soldiers and rebels retained some of the weapons for increasing engagement in criminal activities and inter-communal violence. The third way that Biafra is linked to contemporary violence in Nigeria relates to the vulnerability of African societies to becoming caught in a 'conflict

trap'. Econometric studies conflicts in Africa by such scholars as Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner (2006:13) attempt to establish that:

> (O)nce a country stumbled into a civil war, there was always the danger that it would enter a dysfunctional cycle in which the legacy of war was a heightened risk of further conflict, partly because of this time effect and partly because of the likely decline in income. The principal legacy of civil war is a grossly heightened risk of further civil war.

A common feature of these three explanations is that they suggest a causal connection between the Nigeria Civil War and contemporary violence. This article takes a different path by attempting to show that the Civil War did not set in motion the processes of contemporary violence in Nigeria, but that both are products of a prior causal factor. Both arose from the growing use of state violence as a tool of governance, a strategy that emerged from what Claude Ake called 'political anxiety'. In the face of weak institutions for managing political competition, 'political anxiety' refers to a 'fear of the consequences of not being in control of government associated with a profound distrust of political opponents', leading to antagonistic and increasingly violent relations between the state and oppositional political and social groups. This has transformed the state's 'legitimate monopoly of violence' from a mechanism for maintaining order into a form of oppression that undermines legitimacy and national cohesion. As a retired Nigerian general observed:

> When the armed forces are called out for internal security role especially in ethnic riots or communal conflicts over issues that were created by politicians and should have been resolved politically, then you are asking for a military solution by running away from or buying time for a political solution. When this happens more and more, the institutional political control machinery and mechanism becomes weak. That is a sign of weak government and the room is created for the military and some civilian opportunists to believe that they can do better (Williams 2002: 100–1).

The main argument proposed here is that it was state violence, rather than cultural divisions, that triggered the secessionist attempt of Biafra and continues to foster ethnic nationalism in contemporary Nigeria. The Nigerian Civil War arose, not from ethnic antagonisms, but from botched efforts to restore Nigerian federalism. Prior to the war, the Igbo were the group with the strongest commitment to federalism, and the two coups that immediately preceded the Civil War represented attempts to reassert federalist principles amid growing ethnic wrangling and political crisis. However, suspicions of bias in the execution of the coups to serve ethnic interests exacerbated rather than calmed ethnic tensions. In the process, the coups gave way to

ethnic pogroms carried out by Northern Nigerian civilians against fellow Nigerians of Igbo origin resident in the northern region of the country. The failure of the Nigerian security agencies to stop the pogroms of 1966–7 in which thousands of Eastern Nigerians were killed in several Northern Nigerian cities was perceived by many not as ethnic conflict, but as state violence. In failing to guarantee the security of law-abiding Eastern Nigerians, the army and other security agencies of the state became glorified 'ethnic militias' (Akinyemi 2002), and the state and its security apparatuses were perceived as jaundiced in the mediation of social conflicts. Deep-seated ethnic grievances were the product, rather than the cause, of this experience of state violence.

This is the forgotten lesson of the Nigerian Civil War. I suggest that state violence against various groups within society has led to the proliferation of ethnic and regional 'republics' within Nigeria, rather than vice versa, as generally supposed. The emergence in post-Civil War Nigeria of regimes that turned a blind eye to or appeared impotent amid killings of persons from particular ethnic or religious groups, and trigger-happy heads of state who gave shoot-on-sight orders to soldiers deployed to troubled sections of the country, remain critical to understanding the contemporary waning of the affective orientation of some Nigerians to the Nigerian state. The aim of the article is to underscore the understated salience of state violence in the debates on identity and citizenship in multi-ethnic societies. By state violence is meant any act by the state or its agents that causes physical or mental injury against the person or property of its law-abiding citizen or group of citizens. State violence also exists where the state or its agents may not have been directly responsible for the act but are perceived to have sanctioned the act by their failure to intervene or prosecute the perpetrators of violence.

If the *raison d'être* of the state is the security and prosperity of its members, the state that fails to protect the life, liberty and estate of its citizens loses the loyalty of those citizens. It is at this point, theoretically speaking, that such citizens transfer their loyalties to another entity that they trust to guarantee their collective security. Even in contexts where such citizens do not physically and or politically opt out of the state by secession, or a refusal to pay taxes or join the armed forces, withdrawal of allegiance is evident in the changing modes of self-identification and a reimagining of nationhood. I will argue that state violence explains why the Igbo ethnic group, which in the colonial era and during the early years of independence was apparently most committed to a common Nigerian identity, currently has the highest percentage of citizens who favour ethnic over national identity. The same destructive pressures of state violence that led to the outbreak of Civil War in the 1960s have triggered a reimagining of Biafra among the Igbo since the 1990s.

In the next section I show that, contrary to the 'culture of violence' or 'conflict trap' theses, there was actually a reduction in the incidence of violence in the immediate post-war period. The image of Biafra faded in the context of state-supported efforts at reconciliation and the economic expansionism of the oil boom. The third section turns to an analysis of the factors that led to the return of state violence, generating increasing conflict between ethnic and religious groups and creating patterns of violence that tended to converge with particular force on the Igbo. A concluding fourth section presents the contemporary Igbo experience of state violence and demonstrates how this experience has fuelled a revival of self-determination and ethnic nationalism.

The Absence of State Violence in the Immediate Post-Civil War Era

Nigeria did not just survive the Civil War, it emerged from it a stronger state and a more united country. Three factors accounted for the new-found strength and unity. Firstly, the boom in oil exports and centralization of oil revenues enabled the Federal Government to be more visible in redistributive politics and invigorated centripetal tendencies in the Nigerian social formation. Secondly, the dissolution of Nigeria's three regions and creation of twelve smaller states, comparatively speaking, facilitated the devalorization of centrifugal forces and the containment of regionalism. It terminated the era when the regional tail wagged the federal dog. Thirdly, the Nigerian state became hegemonic in the sense that it was able to exercise domination without exertion of physical force and mobilization of violence. It is this third factor, which is contrary to the tenor of the 'war begets war' thesis, that this section addresses.

The absence of state violence in the immediate post-Civil War years[1] stemmed from the recognition by the major *dramatis personae* of the central role of violence in the outbreak of conflict and of the necessity of non-violence for conflict resolution and national integration. This recognition is well captured in the statements that both Ojukwu, the leader of Biafra, and Yakubu Gowon, the Nigerian Head of State, gave on 15 January 1970 to mark the end of the Civil War:

> We are convinced that Biafra will survive. Biafra was born out of the blood of innocents slaughtered in Nigeria during the pogroms of 1966. Biafra will ever live, not as a dream but as the crystallization of the cherished hopes of people who see in the establishment of this territory a last hope for peace and security. Biafra cannot be destroyed by mere force of arms. … Biafra lives (Ojukwu in Kirk-Greene 1993: 456).
>
> The so-called 'Rising Sun of Biafra' is set for ever. It will be a great disservice for anyone to continue to use the word Biafra to refer to any part of the East

> Central State of Nigeria. The tragic chapter of violence is just ended. We are set at the dawn of national reconciliation. Once again, we have an opportunity to build a new nation (Gowon, in Kirk-Greene 1993:897).

There is a sense in which Gowon had anticipated Ojukwu by recognizing that Biafra could not be destroyed by mere force of arms. This is evident in the code of conduct he handed down to his soldiers. Putting aside for a moment the controversies surrounding what actually transpired or did not happen in the battlefield, Gowon was consistent in his call for an economical use of violence in the war. He recognized that the appeal and staying power of Ojukwu and his advisers derived from the memories of violence against Igbo and Easterners, which the Biafran leadership masterfully manipulated. Gowon deemed the economy of violence not only important for winning the war but also for winning the peace. He told his soldiers:

> You must all bear in mind at all times that other nations in Africa and the rest of the world are looking at us to see how well we can perform this task which the nation demands of us. You must also remember that you are not fighting a war with a foreign enemy. Nor are you fighting a religious war or Jihad. You are only subduing the rebellion of Lt. Col. Odumegwu-Ojukwu and his clique. *You must not do anything that will endanger the future unity of the country.* We are in honour bound to observe the rules of the Geneva Convention. (Gowon, in Kirk-Greene 1993:456; emphasis added).

It is difficult to ascertain under the conditions of warfare whether Gowon kept his word or whether the soldiers dutifully obeyed his orders. There were reports of air strikes on hospitals and markets in contravention of the Geneva Convention. However, the fact that many Nigerian soldiers not only allowed cross-border trade but also married Biafran women suggests that they agreed with their commander-in-chief that this was not a total war. In fact, a rare gender analysis of the Civil War that documents such liaisons also highlights the role of the controversial marriages in both providing succour to starving Biafran families and facilitating post-war reconciliation and reintegration (Chuku 1982).

In retrospect, it seems that the policy of economic blockade was partly aimed at reducing the death toll from direct combat. For instance, Gowon justified the decision of his government to ban a number of foreign governments and humanitarian organizations from participating in the distribution of supplies after the war on the ground that they provided relief materials to cushion the effects of the economic blockade:

> These are the governments and organizations which sustained the rebellion. They are thus guilty of the blood of thousands who perished because of the prolongation of the futile rebel resistance. They did not act out of love for

> humanity. Their purpose was to disintegrate Nigeria and Africa and impose their will on us … we shall therefore not allow them to divide and estrange us again from one another with their dubious and insulting gifts and their false humanitarianism: (cited in Streamlau 1977:368).

The commitment of the Federal Government towards non-violence became incontrovertible after the Civil War. Although the government failed to compel people who had occupied so-called abandoned property in Lagos, Kaduna, Enugu, Port Harcourt and Aba among other towns to restore them to their rightful owners, it generally succeeded in creating an atmosphere in which there were no violent recriminations. The non-violent end to the Nigerian Civil War confounded Western observers. For instance, the French journalist de Jorre, who was astounded that 'there was no genocide, massacres or gratuitous killings', remarked that 'in the history of warfare, there can rarely have been such a bloodless end and such a merciful aftermath' (cited in Stremlau 1977:366). Contrary to perceptions that the war created a situation in which Nigerians began to celebrate violence, the Gowon administration gave a strong symbolic signpost to the policy of 'no victor, no vanquished'. There were no victory celebrations; no triumphal parades; no war monuments or memorials; no battle honors; and no promotion for service in battle (Streamlau 1977:371).

Moreover, the resistance movement completely demobilized and guerrilla activity did not follow after the war even though many erstwhile Nigerian soldiers and policemen who joined the armed forces of defunct Biafra were not readmitted or retired with benefits. This is because the state had guaranteed the security of Igbo people who soon after the war decided to return to major Nigerian cities in search of jobs and business opportunities. Although the returnees suffered great losses from the poor exchange value of the Biafran currency, which ceased to be legal tender after the end of the war, they felt safe enough to embark on new ventures. Nothing demonstrates the reintegration of the Igbo into Nigerian socio-political and economic life as clearly as the post-war careers of some of the major officers of the defunct Biafran government. Streamlau (1977:372), who gives a snapshot of their careers, shows for instance that Dr Pius Okigbo, Ojukwu's adviser, established a consultancy firm in Lagos and won contracts from the Federal Government while Comrade Uche Chukwumerije, erstwhile director of propaganda in Biafra, became a magazine publisher and was part of the press delegation that accompanied General Gowon to OAU meetings. The attempts at reintegration and the healing process that took place in the 1970s were 'exemplary by global standards' (Gboyega 1997:150).

The process of reintegration took place in an environment of economic boom, relative security and a general sense among prominent members of

the regime that the destiny of Africans at home and in the diaspora rested on developments in Nigeria. Although the oil boom generated social inequalities and resulted in increased crime rates, violence was mostly inter-personal. There were no reports of inter-group violence and state violence was notable in its rarity. Gowon's conciliatory and accommodating traits were eventually blamed for making government appear weak and unlike a military regime. This, it was argued, created a salubrious environment for indiscipline and corruption among public officers. When Gowon reneged on the collective decision of the regime to hand over power to civilians in 1974, he handed some elements in the regime a popular reason to effect a change of leadership. On 29 May 1975, Yakubu Gowon was toppled while attending a meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Against the background of the rarity of political violence during this period, it is not surprising that this was Nigeria's first bloodless coup. However, the attempt of the new regime under Gen. Murtala Mohammed to sanitize the Nigerian polity through summary dismissal of public officials accused of corrupt practices, and sacking of officials considered to be too close to the former head of state, generated political tensions across the country even though some of the purges were welcomed by the Nigerian public. Moreover, the plan of the regime to create new states and local governments led to the resurgence of ethno-communal mobilizations and political anxiety. Ten days after his regime created seven new states, Mohammed was assassinated in an unsuccessful coup on 13 February 1976.

Political Anxiety and the Return of State Violence

The assassination of Murtala Mohammed and its aftermath launched Nigeria into another era of political anxiety and state violence. The mutineers, who included close relatives of the former head of state, were mostly from the Middle Belt and were allegedly aggrieved that Middle Belt indigenes had been relegated to the background in the new regime. They felt this was an unjust reward for their contribution to the Civil War effort. This was the first indication of an emergent martial right to rule, the trend where Nigerian generals based their claims to rulership on their prowess in fighting to keep Nigeria together during the Civil War. The summary execution of the 32 officers involved in the coup attempt, including a general, found guilty by the special military tribunal on 15 May 1976, revived memories of the events of 1966 where political violence led to the elimination of a generation of politicians and military officers from a particular region of the country.

The effects of the failed coup on Nigerian political culture were profound. Firstly, since Gen. Mohammed was killed while going to work without a convoy, security around the head of state and other senior regime officials

was increased. This marked the beginning of a new era where the appurtenances of office included sirens and convoys intended to protect the governors from the governed. Secondly, the ensuing political anxiety made the regime intolerant of criticism and opposition from groups both within the regime and in civil society. The first group to attract the ire of the regime was musicians. In 1977, soldiers invaded 'Kalakuta Republic', the commune of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the Afrobeat artist, for releasing an album entitled 'Zombie', which was a scathing critique of praetorian rule in Nigeria. Several residents, including the artist's mother, a nationalist and women's rights activist, were wounded in the incident. The next group to become victims of state violence was students. In April 1978, the government deployed soldiers to quell student demonstrations against an increase in food costs in the universities. The confrontation between soldiers and students resulted in the death of some students and the closure of universities. Universities readily became sites of struggle as the military authorities assumed greater powers over the appointment and promotion of principal staff. Vice chancellors and lecturers were sacked and others appointed with immediate effect through radio announcements.

State violence coincided with rising agitations for return to democratic rule. The military government of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo continued with the transition programme initiated under Mohammed's short-lived tenure and established a Constituent Assembly, which was to consider a draft constitution prepared by the Constitution Drafting Committee. One of the most divisive issues in the Assembly was the proposal for the establishment of a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal. The walkout staged by Northern delegates proved costly as the Assembly, with a Southern and Middle Belt majority, recommended a constitution that did not provide for a Federal Sharia Court. The popular perception that this was a victory for Christians generated resentment among Muslims, setting the stage for future religious conflicts.

Religious conflicts assumed violent dimensions in the Second Republic inaugurated on 1 October 1979. There were, on the one hand, more incidents of sectarian violence between Islamic sects and, on the other, confrontations between Christian and Muslims in several cities in the North. For instance, between 1980 and 1985, there were confrontations between security agents and the Maitatsine sect, which criticized the practices and teachings of orthodox Islamic sects, resulting in the loss of some 10,000 lives. More lives were lost in October 1982 when riots that started with objections of Muslims to the reconstruction of church close to a mosque in Kano, spread to Zaria and Kaduna. Although these conflicts were about struggles for preeminence among adherents of religious groups, they also had political and economic undertones (see Osaghae 1998; Williams 1997). A high point of this period

was the increasing reliance of the civilian administration, which faced a legitimacy crisis from the onset as a result of controversies over the general elections, on the use of force to manage dissent. For instance, on 28 April 1980, the government deployed police to quell peasant protests against the construction of a dam in Bakolori, Sokoto State. The government claimed that 25 persons were killed, though unofficial sources indicated that there were 386 casualties and 216 bodies were physically identified (Shettima 1997:76).

The regime's increasing reliance on force was evident in the creation of a special riot mobile police unit to suppress dissent. The size of the police force grew tenfold from 10,000 to 100,000 between 1979 and 1983. Arms expenditure also skyrocketed from 3 million to 36 million between 1979 and 1982 (Osaghae 1998). The period also witnessed the proliferation of vigilante groups and hit squads attached to powerful politicians. These groups were implicated in the violence that marred the controversial 1983 general elections.

The military cited electoral fraud, state violence, allegations of corruption and abuse of office by politicians as the reasons why they intervened again on 31 December 1983. However, the new regime bungled the popular goodwill that greeted its arrival by unleashing a reign of terror on civil society in its attempt to fight indiscipline. The media, professional organizations such as the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) and the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), as well as 'politicians' were victimized, and soldiers brutalized ordinary citizens in the name of instilling discipline. State violence was fuelled by two factors during this period. Firstly, the regime used violence to create an 'enabling environment' for its unpopular economic recovery programme. Secondly, the regime deployed violence to enervate countervailing social forces. The latter was necessary because, led by two Muslims and Northerners, the new regime was the first to ignore the country's post-independence convention in which religious and regional factors were crucial in the filling the two topmost positions. The fact that Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon preferred rule by force to rule by dialogue and consensus was adduced as one of the reasons for the palace coup that swept them out of office in August 1985.

It is against this background that the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida started out as a liberal military government that was sensitive to public opinion and advertised its preference to govern by consensus. However, once the regime came under pressure it became apparent that consultative mechanisms were rituals of regime legitimatization. Early in its life, the regime went against the recommendations of the nationwide debate on the controversial IMF loan and the Political Bureau. It also ignored widespread appeals for clemency and proceeded to execute 14 military officers convicted of plotting a coup.

The fact that eight of the 14 condemned officers were from Benue State and the ringleader, General Mamman Vatsa, was Babangida's best man was intended to show that the regime would not be swayed by sentiment when it faced any threat to its survival. The remaining veneer of regime openness was eroded when the second in command and highest-ranking Christian in the regime claimed that the controversial enrolment of the country into the Organization of The Islamic Confrence (OIC) was never discussed in the Supreme Military Council.

In the context of rising religious fundamentalism in the country, the OIC issue triggered several incidents of violent religious conflicts in Northern Nigerian cities that were quelled by the deployment of soldiers. Soldiers were also used to silence students' protests against the introduction of structural adjustment and deteriorating living conditions. University lecturers, unionized workers, journalists and lawyers soon joined the category of 'extremists' that the regime sought to suppress or eliminate. By the end of the 1980s, the Nigerian public had become traumatized by state violence as the increasingly unpopular Babangida regime seemed to have emptied its bag of tricks for hanging on to power. The militarization of Nigerian society became disconcerting even to 'experts of violence' like the former Biafran leader:

> The pervasive violence of Nigeria is underlined and highlighted by the sight of uniforms everywhere. … Uniforms abound and a citizen of this country is permanently intimidated by this proliferation of uniforms – some he recognizes and respects; others he does not recognize but dares not disrespect. Everywhere the citizen of this country is assaulted with violence: in his home where he is obliged to erect and inhabit his own prison; in his place of work which he has to turn into a fortress and in the streets where his fears borders on schizophrenia. … With mouth agape, 'the Nigerian' has watched a national metamorphosis where 'keeping the peace' has become 'killing the peace' (Ojukwu 1989:26).

The 1990s, however, witnessed more state violence as the military regime manoeuvred to remain in power against public opinion and in contradiction to its own transition programme. The military dictatorship fostered ethnic, religious and regional polarization in the country that manifested in various violent inter-group conflicts. The fact that these identity conflicts and struggles were not confined to society in general but had also infiltrated the military institution was evidenced by the increasingly regional and ethnic character of a series of coup plots. In April 1990, the regime foiled an attempt to overthrow it by violent means. Described as the bloodiest coup in the country's history, the 22 April coup was hatched and executed by officers largely from the Niger Delta. The regional motivation of the coup plotters is evidenced by their decision to excise the 'core' Northern states from Nigeria,

and by the alleged involvement of civilians in the planning and execution of the botched plot. Out of 100 military and civilians charged 67 were executed, and the regime felt so vulnerable in the aftermath of the coup that it hurriedly relocated to Abuja (Osaghae 1998).

Since challenges to the regime increasingly took ethno-regional forms, as the state had assiduously worked towards crippling and compromising other civil platforms, state violence was increasingly perceived as directed at ethnic and regional groups. This was manifested in the failure of the regime to curb recurrent religious conflicts in northern cities where Easterners, mostly Igbo, were the cannon fodder. In 1993, the regime annulled the 12 June presidential elections, adjudged as free and fair by both domestic and foreign observers. The annulment deepened the political crisis as it lent credence to perceptions that the so-called 'Northern oligarchy' was determined to hold on to power at all cost. Popular resistance to the annulment, which received tacit support from the military hierarchy, forced Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to 'step aside' and leave behind an Interim National Government (ING) of dubious legitimacy (see Alli 2001).

However, Nigeria was thrown from the frying pan into the fire when General Sani Abacha, the Minister of Defence, sacked the ING and returned the country to full-blown military rule to defend the annulment. He arrested and detained Alhaji MKO Abiola, winner of the 12 June-elections, after the latter declared himself president. Anxious to remain in power, Abacha unleashed violence at both real and imagined opponents. The strategy to eliminate all opposition ranged from assassination of members of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), the rallying point of groups seeking restoration of the 12 June mandate; closure of critical media houses; proscription of labour unions; indefinite closure of universities; to liquidation of businesses of political opponents. Victims of the regime included Kudirat Abiola, wife of the jailed winner of the historic elections, and Alfred Rewane, a NADECO financier, both of whom were murdered in cold blood. Alex Ibru, publisher of the Guardian newspapers, narrowly escaped being killed because he failed to restrain his newspaper, though he had been appointed Minister of Internal Affairs by the regime. Critical generals such as Olusegun Obasanjo and Shehu Musa Yar'Adua were also arrested, convicted and jailed for plotting to overthrow the regime. A sense that Abacha was afraid of his own shadow became apparent when his second in command, General Oladipo Diya, was also arrested, convicted and jailed for plotting a coup. Most of the named conspirators, in what most Nigerians perceived as one of Abacha's phantom coups, were Yoruba.

The Yoruba became the butt of state violence because protests against the annulment were loudest in the south-west though most Nigerians rejected

the annulment. In fact, the military regime succeeded in ethnicizing the 12 June struggle and making it appear as though it was a Yoruba affair. The onslaught against the Yoruba led to the emergence of the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), an ethno-political association committed to defending the Yoruba 'race'. OPC members became enmeshed in conflicts with state security agencies and other ethnic groups that they perceived were either in support of the annulment or not committed to the struggles against the military.

But it was not just the Yoruba who were singled out for punishment. Increasingly, minorities in the Niger Delta, protesting against environmental degradation and exploitation by the unholy alliance between oil capital and the Nigerian state, became victims of a specific genre of state violence called 'petro-violence' (Watts 1999; Zalik 2004). The 'tiny' Ogoni group was isolated and made an example of, to teach other groups that the Nigerian state was still capable of suppressing rebellion. Ken Saro-Wiwa and other members of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) were hanged, after scores of Ogoni women were raped and hundreds of Ogoni youth were murdered by Nigerian soldiers (see Ibeanu and Luckham 2006).

To be sure, violence was not the only weapon that the brutal military regimes used to keep their illegitimate power. The military wooed the venal political class with appointments, and state and local government-creation exercises. However, such bribes often resulted in factional conflicts and violent inter-group conflicts. For instance, state and local government-creation exercises triggered conflicts between the Ife and Modakeke in Osun State; Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri in Delta State; Umuleri and Aguleri in Anambra State; Jukun, Tiv and Chamba in Taraba State; and 'Hausa–Fulani' and other 'indigenous' groups in Bauchi and Plateau States. The appointment of Uche Chukwumerije, erstwhile Biafran propaganda chief, as Abacha's information minister became a sore point in Igbo–Yoruba relations. In most of these conflicts, the state was perceived as partisan. Security agents deployed to restore peace were accused of supporting one group against the other. It is hardly surprising therefore that several communities regarded the Nigerian military forces as an 'army of occupation' (Ukiwo 2003; Hazen 2007). Such communities increasingly resorted to establishing or reviving ethnic militias and vigilante groups as they believed the state had become a predator instead of a protector.

The 'miraculous' demise of Abacha in 1998 and the subsequent transition to civilian rule in 1999 did little to change the character of the Nigerian state. Like his military predecessors, the government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was fatally afflicted by the virus of political anxiety. The strenuous effort of the guest president to become de facto party leader and father of the nation

destabilized the ruling party and the polity. Also destabilizing for the polity was the widespread perception that the 'power-shift' to the South West was influenced by the militant agitations of the OPC. It is hardly surprising that other 'oppressed' groups in the Niger Delta, Middle Belt and South East activated militias and self-determination movements in the post-military period to agitate for greater power at the centre. These 'subaltern' groups, however, were taught the Orwellian lesson that while all ethno-regional groups are equal some groups are more equal than the others in the discriminatory response of the regime to agitation. A newspaper columnist captured widespread perceptions of selective state violence in the following words:

> Each time there is a report of anarchy in the South-west, the man in Odi, Bayelsa State in the South-south zone surely expects to hear that a battalion of soldiers have been deployed there to restore peace. Already, a precedent has been set. For harbouring bandits, Odi town was pounced on last November by a battalion of troops of the Nigerian Army, leaving tales of sorrow, tears and blood. So, with its increasing nuisance, OPC is today putting Obasanjo in a position of having to explain to the Odi man why these instances of bare-faced outlawry have not been treated with the savage response similar to what happened in Odi last year (Odion 2000).

Despite the national outrage against the Odi Massacre, the regime also deployed soldiers to destroy Zaki Ibiam, another 'minority' community in Benue State, that allegedly harboured people who had killed soldiers. Yet the same regime looked helplessly to the judiciary to resolve the Sharia crisis that precipitated the massacre of tens of thousands of Nigerians mostly from the South and Middle Belt in religious rioting in several Northern cities. The regime also declared a state of emergency in Plateau State over the failure of the state government to curb communal violence, even though similar forms of violence were raging in other Northern states at the time.

It is this perception that the state had been captured and had become a machine of violence to serve particular interest groups, as well as the perception that power flows from violent agitation, that is responsible for the recent revival of self-determination movements in Nigeria. I demonstrate this with the case of contemporary ethnic mobilization among the Igbo in south-eastern Nigeria.

State Violence and the Resurgence of Biafra

The rising sun of Biafra had set by 1982 when Ojukwu returned to the country at the end of his 'short' trip in search of 'peace', which turned out to be a 13-year exile in Côte d'Ivoire. The crowds that gathered to welcome him evinced the changed circumstance with the form of greetings they accorded their quondam hero. As sounds of 'Onyeije Nno' ('Welcome, traveller') and

not 'Nzogbu Nzogbu, Enyimba Enyi' (an Igbo war chant) rent the air in Aba, Onitsha, Owerri and Enugu, it was evident that the crowds had gathered to welcome a 'traveller' instead of an ethnic hero. Ojukwu himself seemed to have abandoned his ambitions of leading the Igbo people to freedom when he accepted the title of 'Ikemba' from his native Nnewi. The only befitting title given to the erstwhile governor of Eastern Nigeria, and self-proclaimed leader and defender of the Igbo people, was an honorary title from his clan. Ojukwu's decision to join the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in appreciation of the presidential pardon extended to him and to contest a senatorial seat on the platform of the party that was widely regarded as the bastion of 'Hausa–Fulani hegemony' (from which Biafra was supposed to free the Igbo), epitomized the eclipse of Biafra.

Ironically, in 1969 and 1970, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe had taken up the task of taking the Igbo back to mainstream Nigeria through his missives from Lagos, which proclaimed that Nigeria was 'safe' for returning Igbo.[2] In 1983, it was Ojukwu's turn to lead the Igbo back into the mainstream of Nigerian politics, from which Azikiwe's Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) seemed to have sequestered them. Zik the nationalist was leading a party that by 1983 was barely struggling to survive in the Igbo heartland, while Ojukwu the 'rebel' was wooing his people back to the political centre. Ojukwu lost the senatorial elections in 1983. This political disgrace was only mitigated by the military intervention, which did not allow his little-known opponent to savour electoral victory.

Twenty years later, in 2003, Ojukwu's second appearance in partisan politics was as the presidential candidate of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), a party that was hoping to reap benefits from the clamour for an Igbo president. By 2003, Ojukwu had been elevated from 'Ikemba Nnewi' (Strength of Nnewi) to 'Eze Ndi Igbo Gburu Gburu' (King of the entire Igbo nation) – an invented 'traditional' title in defiance of the well-known Igbo parable that 'Igbo enwe(ghi) eze' (The Igbo do not have kings). He had also discarded the trite honorary title of 'Chief' for 'Dim' (Warrior).

How do we explain the re-radicalization of Ojukwu? What transpired between 1983 and 2003 to make Ojukwu reconsider reclaiming his 'destiny' as leader of the Igbo? The answer lies in the Igbo experience of violence during this period in the many ethno-religious riots in Northern Nigerian cities. The particular event that re-radicalized Ojukwu was the bloody Kano riots of 1991. Ojukwu, who toured Kano at the invitation of Igbo communal associations in the city, claimed he was dazed by the extent of suffering of his people. Ojukwu reportedly said he was ready to fight again to protect his people. He declared that 'if the sacrifice needed for the building of the Nigerian nation is the constant shedding of Igbo blood, then let us not be a nation'.

Although nine years were to elapse before the rise of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Ojukwu's declaration signalled the rebirth of Biafra. He was responding to the feelings of victimhood among the Igbo, especially the youth. Several events since the mid-1980s had created a persecution complex among the Igbo. Firstly, Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe, the first Igbo to be appointed second in command under a military regime, was allegedly removed from office over his opposition to the surreptitious enrolment of Nigeria into the OIC (Osaghae 1998). Secondly, Igbo residents in some Northern Nigerian cities had become easy targets in incessant religious riots. Thirdly, the Igbo were perceived as having lost their stature as one of the country's majority ethnic groups. Minoritization of the Igbo stemmed from political marginalization as Igbo elites became increasingly scarce in Federal executives and Supreme Military Councils, being only considered fit for 'non-juicy' positions (Mustapha 2006). Fourthly, the Igbo were perceived to have lost out in successive state and local government-creation exercises. Whereas there are six states each in the South West, South South, North East and North Central, and seven states in the North West, the Igbo only have five states, with dire implications for their share of the national cake. Fifthly, there were allegations that the Igbo had been neglected in the distribution of Federal projects and Federal services. This absence of Federal presence was epitomized by the absence of security in Onitsha and Aba, both thriving Igbo commercial cities. The poorly equipped and unmotivated Nigeria Police Force could not withstand the surging wave of armed robbery and banditry that had enveloped the cities and posed a threat to commercial activity, which in the absence of jobs in the public sector became a means of social mobility among young Igbo men. Igbo traders rose to the occasion to establish vigilante groups to protect their businesses. However, this initiative became a victim of high-wire politics between some governors of the Igbo states and the Federal Government (Ukiwo 2003a; Meagher 2007).

Meanwhile, the Igbo elite were perceived as patently incapable of forging a common front to address the 'threats' and 'challenges' facing the Igbo people in contemporary Nigeria.[3] Some effort at unity was made when elite figures formed Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo, which became the dominant pan-Igbo organization by 2000 and was popular for documenting and presenting human rights violations perpetrated against the Igbo between 1966 and 1999 to the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission. However, the group was soon fractionalized by internal power tussles and party politics. The Ohanaeze began to fall apart in 2003 as the general elections approached. The bone of contention was whether or not the body should make good its

agitation for an Igbo presidency by supporting an Igbo candidate and sponsoring a political party. Ohanaeze was divided over whether the Igbo should support former Vice President Alex Ekwueme, who was aspiring for the ticket of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), or Odumegwu-Ojukwu, who had secured the APGA ticket unopposed, or wait for the 'turn of the Igbo' in 2007. The PDP governors of the Igbo states managed to reunite the group after the 2003 elections. However, the ambition of four out of five Igbo state governors to become the 'Igbo president' in 2007 was an indication that the crisis had merely been postponed. It is hardly surprising that Ohaneze split on the eve of the 2007 general elections over the desire of some members to endorse Dr Orji Uzor Kalu, Governor of Abia State, as the 'consensus' Igbo candidate for the presidency. The populist governor had become the beacon of hope of Igbo youth through deft manipulation of anti-Obasanjo sentiments in Igboland, arising partly from the inability of the Federal Government to protect Igbo life and property (Igwe and Awoyinfa 2001).

Igbo youths have rallied around MASSOB and other groups such as the Biafra Foundation and the Biafra Actualization Forum, mainly based in the United States, all of which agitate for the reestablishment of the Biafra State. The direct role of violence in instigating ethnic nationalism and self-determination movements is evidenced by the emergence of MASSOB in the crucible of the Sharia riots of 2000 in which about 5,000 Igbo residents in a number of Northern Nigerian cities were killed (Agbu 2004:27). Though born out of violence, MASSOB has eschewed all acts of political violence, preferring to realize its objectives through peaceful means. This method is attributed to the ideology of its founder and president, Chief Ralph Uwazurike, who studied in an Indian university and was influenced by Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence (Omeje 2005:631).

Thus, MASSOB and its sister-organizations have embarked on the acquisition of most of the appurtenances of a sovereign state, except a national army. It has launched and hoisted the Biafra flag in several Nigerian cities and villages; declared 30 May, the date of the outbreak of the Nigeria Civil War, as 'Biafra Day' when all 'Biafrans' are supposed to stay at home; purportedly reproduced the Biafran currency; opened and run a radio station; established an embassy in the capital of the world's superpower, the United States; and mobilized 'Biafrans' against participating in such civic duties as elections and the census in Nigeria. Most importantly, MASSOB has embarked on grassroots mobilization, tapping on the resentment of jobless and aggrieved youths to establish branches of the organization in many Igbo cities and towns. Not surprisingly, these provocative acts have drawn the ire of the Nigerian State, which has responded by arresting MASSOB leaders and burning

their operational bases. This response of the state has unwittingly boosted support for MASSOB as its supporters complain that the state has used excessive violence to clamp down on a dovish organization whereas other organizations and ethnic militias that have adopted violent tactics, such as the OPC, have been treated with kid gloves (see Ukiwo 2003b).

As the popularity of MASSOB surged, it nonetheless remained disconnected from the dominant power blocs in the region. Although Ojukwu expressed symbolic support for the organization by participating in the opening of Biafra House in Washington DC and declaring that he was ready to fight again to protect the Igbo, the relations of the organization with most Igbo elites is at best lukewarm, and at worst actively hostile. Most of the governors of the Igbo states in the Fourth Republic regarded MASSOB members as irritants and undesirable elements (see Egwuonwu 2004). For instance, following clashes between MASSOB and road transport workers in 2006, Peter Obi, the Anambra State Governor, appealed to the Federal Government to deploy soldiers to rid the state of MASSOB activists and other miscreants.[4] The Governor alleged that MASSOB was being sponsored by certain political interest groups to destabilize the state government.[5]

Further evidence of this lack of support is the fact that the Igbo political establishment did not embark on a campaign for the release of Uwazuruike and many of his lieutenants after they were arrested for treason in a general clampdown on leaders of ethnic militias in 2005. This contrasted sharply with mobilizations among the Yoruba and Ijaw political establishments for the release of Ganiyu Adams of the OPC and Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF). It was not until the continued incarceration of Uwazuruike several months after other leaders of ethnic militias had been released sufficiently embarrassed the Igbo political establishment that some Igbo senators began to demand Uwazuruike's release to enable him to perform the funeral of his late mother. Uwazuruike was given leave from detention in late October 2007 after several Nigerian newspaper editorials had joined the campaign for his release. However, the Uwazuruike saga again portrayed the Nigerian State as biased and lent credence to perceptions that the Igbo were being treated as second-class citizens. As the MASSOB leader said in the reception organized in his honour:

> Now, I have not been granted bail. I have only been allowed 90 days to go and bury my mother. I, therefore stand to reason that if my mother had not died, I will certainly not have been released. Asari Dokubo's mother did not die before he was released. Ganiyu Adams' mother did not die before he was released. Frederick Fasehun's mother did not die before he was released. My mother had to die before I was released simply because I am an Igbo man.[6]

As a result of the travails of the organization and its leaders,[7] MASSOB has become more popular among Igbo people. For instance, judging by the attendance at the reception organized for Uwazuruike in Enugu, the *Vanguard* newspaper reported that 'it has become clear that over 90 per cent of the entire Igbo people are, indeed, backing the movement'.[8] This popularity rating is better appreciated if juxtaposed with results of AFROBAROMETER surveys conducted in 2007, which showed that the Igbo had the greatest percentage of respondents who preferred their ethnic identity to their national identity. While the respondents from other major ethnic groups who preferred ethnic to national identity was 29 and 22 per cent respectively for Yoruba and Hausa, it was 53 per cent among Igbo respondents. The other ethnic group that exceeded the national average of 31 per cent was the Ijaw at 45 per cent (Lewis 2007). This is striking, considering that the Igbo were the most committed Federalists in the period just before the Civil War.

Conclusion: Violence, Identity Mobilization and the Reimagining of Biafra

The post-1980 Igbo experience of violence discussed above led to the proliferation of memoirs and novels about the Civil War, first by war veterans and later on by younger elements who recalled childhood war experiences or retold tales of suffering and slaughter (see, for instance, Madiebo 1981; Okocha 1994; Adichie 2007).[9] Although the authors of these books and monographs often claimed their objective was not to reopen old wounds, representation of gory accounts of violence against the Igbo, the pre-war pogrom, wartime air strikes and starvation techniques, and post-war abandoned property saga, cumulatively reawakened a persecution complex among the Igbo. For instance, following the Sharia riots of 2000 and 2001, the Igbo Youth Movement (IYM), a group that was agitating for the Igbo presidency, sponsored the republication of the report of the tribunal established by the then Government of the Eastern Region to probe the pogroms of 1966 and 1967 (Obumselu 2001). The report, which showed that 37,000 Easterners (mostly Igbo) had been killed in 1966, worked to situate contemporary experience of violence in historical perspective. The impact of the reprint and similar memoirs of violence was not just to expose the scale of violence to which the Igbo had historically been subjected but also that they drew attention to the 'traditional' unwillingness of the Nigerian State to protect Igbo life and property.

The current experience of state violence encourages the excavation of collective memories of violence before and during the Civil War, while bracketing the period of reconciliation after the war. As in 1966, perceptions

of state complicity in physical and mental violence against the Igbo have fostered identity mobilization and the evolution of communal self-defence mechanisms. In the context of growing violence against Igbos in religious riots in Northern Nigeria, vigilante groups in Igbo towns have begun to embark on reprisal attacks against Northern residents. Many participants in such reprisal attacks have been attracted to MASSOB's mobilization and reimagining of Biafra as the only safe haven for the Igbo.

The Igbo are not an exception. Violence is sometimes seen as the crucible of national consciousness. In fact, elites involved in ethnic mobilization often instigate violence to urge reluctant followers to the frontlines and moderates to jump off the fence (Fearon and Laitin 2000). The shedding of blood leads to a situation where groups begin to conceive of social differences in primordial terms. As Strassberg (1998) shows, the experience of the Holocaust and the transfer of its memories across generations largely accounts for why Jews everywhere emphasize their Jewish identity above national identities. However, African leaders, who in the anxiety to build the nation take to the bludgeoning of restive social groups, especially ethnic groups, have apparently forgotten this lesson. African national identities were often forged in the common experience of violence under colonial rule, and separatist ethnic nationalities are likely to be strengthened rather than overcome by current strategies of discrimination and violence (Fanon 1961). By forgetting too early the lessons of history, we risk repeating it as the passion for nation-building is paradoxically resulting in nation-destruction in Nigeria and beyond.

Notes

1. Ibeanu and Luckham (2006) have also observed the relative absence of non-violence after the war.
2. See, for instance, 'Azikiwe Appeals to his Fellow-Easterners', in Kirk-Greene 1993: 422–6.
3. See Uche Nworah, 'The Igbo Leadership Crises', published on 20 March 2005 at http://www.nigeriavillagesquare1.com/Articles/Nworah/2005/03/leadership-crises-in-igboland.html.
4. See Sunday Punch, 18 June 2006, pp. 8–10.
5. Saturday Punch, 24 June 2006, p. A12.
6. Vanguard, 5 November 2007, online edition.
7. For a good account of state repression of MASSOB, see Human Rights Watch 2005.
8. Human Rights Watch 2005.
9. A list of books on Biafra compiled by Dan Obi Awduche of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst is available at http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/igbowebpages/Igbo.dir/Biafra/books_on_biafra.htm.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 31–46

(ISSN 0850-3907)

The Informalization of Belonging: Igbo Informal Enterprise and National Cohesion from Below

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Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War evokes images of ethno-regional strife followed by simmering ethnic tension. However, political perspectives on the legacies of Biafra tend to gloss over the more integrative and constructive economic effects of the Civil War and its aftermath. While the Nigerian Civil War devastated Igbo business activities across Nigeria, and precipitated a mass return of Igbo migrants to their home area, it also laid the foundation for a consolidation and rapid development of Igbo informal enterprise, which has had integrative rather than divisive social and economic consequences for Nigeria as a whole. Operating below the radar of political competition, the demands of informal enterprise development have nurtured strong inter-ethnic and inter-regional links between the Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and other Nigerian as well as non-Nigerian groups. With a particular focus on Igbo informal manufacturing, long-distance trading networks and informal money changing, this paper will consider the role of the informal economy in the development of popular structures of national unity. It will also show that these processes of economic integration from below have increasingly been strained by political struggles from above, creating a tide of violence and ethnic polarization that, even more than the Civil War, threatens to unravel the underlying social fabric of Nigerian nationhood.

Résumé

La guerre civile nigériane évoque des images de conflits ethno-régionaux suivis d'une tension ethnique latente. Toutefois, les perspectives politiques sur l'héritage du Biafra ont tendance à se dissimuler dans les effets économiques plus intégratifs et constructifs de la guerre civile et ses séquelles. Si la guerre civile nigériane a anéanti les activités économiques igbo à travers le Nigéria et a

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précipité un retour massif des migrants Igbo vers leur région d'origine, elle a également jeté les bases d'une consolidation et d'un développement rapide de l'entreprise informelle Igbo, ce qui a eu des conséquences économiques et sociales intégratives pour le Nigeria dans son ensemble, plutôt que d'être une source de discorde. Opérant sous le joug de la concurrence politique, les exigences du développement des entreprises informelles ont nourri de solides relations interethniques et interrégionales entre les Igbo, les Hausa, les Yoruba et d'autres Nigérians ainsi que des groupes non-nigérians. Avec un accent particulier sur les industries manufacturières informelles Igbo, les réseaux interurbains de commerce informel et de change Le présent article examine le rôle de l'économie informelle dans le développement de structures populaires de l'unité nationale. Il montre également que les processus d'intégration économique ont été de plus en plus compromis par les luttes politiques susmentionnées, ce qui a ainsi créé une vague de violence et de polarisation ethnique qui, plus encore que la guerre civile, menace de défaire le tissu social qui sous-tend la nation nigériane.

Introduction: Marginalization or Informal Integration?

The Nigerian Civil War is often seen as an event that crystallized ethnic divisions in Nigeria, and led the Igbo people down a trajectory of marginalization from political and economic power. While there is no doubt that, since the Civil War, the Igbo have faced systematic exclusion from the most influential positions in the state and the formal economy, Igbo traders, artisans and business people have achieved legendary success in the informal economy. Land shortage, strong indigenous commercial institutions and a relentless competitive ethos have spurred high levels of out-migration and the development of wide-ranging informal trading networks, not to mention one of the most dynamic informal manufacturing sectors in Africa (Northrup 1978; Brautigam 1997). Far from representing an ethnically insular and exclusive strategy, Igbo advancement within the informal economy has involved the development of strong inter-ethnic linkages and cooperative relations with other Nigerian ethnic groups. While ongoing conflicts over an equitable share of the national cake continue to threaten national cohesion from above, Igbo engagement in the informal economy has been knitting the country together from below.

The conventional view is that Igbo involvement in the informal economy has been a divisive rather than a uniting force. High levels of migration and Igbo dominance of lucrative trades in other ethnic regions of Nigeria, particularly in the Hausa areas of the north, have been represented as important triggers of ethnic riots, both in the run-up to the Civil War, and during serious outbreaks of violence during the 1990s. Just prior to the Civil War, Wayne Nafzinger (1968) argued that ethnic networks were highly exclusive,

highlighting 'barriers to inter-tribal (sic) economic relations' such as language and credit. He maintained that in Nigerian informal business systems, people could only trust those from a similar socio-ethnic background, and suggested that the Civil War was likely to further undermine the prospects for economic cooperation between ethnic groups.

A closer look at popular economic organization, however, reveals a very different picture. Some scholars have noted that migratory pressures and a dependence on informal economic relations with other groups have encouraged the development of strong integrative tendencies among the Igbo. As Harniet-Sievers (2006:126) observed in his comprehensive study of Igbo ethnic identity: 'The long history of Igbo migration and ethnic identity formation before 1966 always included productive interaction with other groups. It continued after 1970 in the everyday life of the re-established Igbo diaspora.' While Igbo economic success at the popular level, as well as their monopolization of profitable activities such as the trade in auto parts, has been a source of resentment and sometimes of conflict, particularly in northern Nigeria, Douglas Anthony points out that such ethnic divisions were mitigated by widespread integrative strategies of Igbo living in northern Nigeria. Whatever cultural and economic divisions arose, Anthony (2002:33) reminds us that 'any generalized depiction of the gulf between groups fails to take into account the ability of individuals to build bridges. … friendships, marriage, commercial and political cooperation, and simple civility played a key role in connecting individuals and, sometimes, communities'.

As Tom Forrest argues, this ability to 'build bridges' with other ethnic communities was not peculiar to the Igbo of the diaspora. It also played a vital role in the rapid development of local industrialization within the Igbo states following the Civil War. Indeed, studies by Forrest (1994) and Brautigam (1997), as well as my own research (Meagher 2006), demonstrate that local industrial dynamism in south-eastern Nigeria did not represent a withdrawal into parochial forms of economic organization, but involved the development of complex trading and productive linkages with other Nigerian ethnic groups, as well as with traders from other parts of Africa and from as far away as East Asia, all without the assistance of the state. The legendary success of Igbo trading and manufacturing networks since the Civil War has been a product of cooperative relations across ethnic cleavages rather than of ethnic exclusivity. As one Igbo informant observed, 'historically we migrated and saw that it was good to have foreigners' (Forrest 1994:169). While communal solidarity has played a central role in Igbo economic advancement, symbiotic forms of institutionalized collaboration with other ethnic groups have been just as critical for widening markets and gaining access to new sources of labour, technology and skills.

In this paper, I will examine the ways in which Igbo involvement in the informal economy, which has been intensified by their post-war marginalization from political and economic power, has strengthened Nigerian inter-ethnic cohesion from below, even as political struggles weaken it from above. This is not to argue that popular frameworks of economic and social solidarity are sufficient to counter divisive forms of political mobilization – for this is clearly not the case – but simply to highlight some of the ways in which Igbo relations with other ethnic groups serve to weave Nigeria together amid the high-profile struggles that threaten to tear it apart. I will begin with a brief examination of the ways in which Igbo identity formation and economic circumstances have encouraged the development of institutions of cooperation across ethnic boundaries. Focusing on Igbo informal activity since the Civil War, I will proceed to show how integrative economic linkages have fostered Igbo economic dynamism both in the diaspora and at home, while simultaneously promoting cohesive relations with other ethnic groups. Examples will be drawn from economic relations between Igbo and Hausa groups in rural as well as urban northern Nigeria, and also from inter-ethnic relations underpinning the much-celebrated development of informal manufacturing in the Igbo home states of south-eastern Nigeria. While these are not tales of unremitting optimism, they highlight some of the ways in which popular, and often ethnic, forms of organization provide social resources for national integration amid the polarizing forces unleashed by ethnic competition over oil rents.

Igbo Identity and the Nigerian Social Fabric

The process of Igbo identity formation has involved integrative economic and religious linkages across communal, and often ethnic, boundaries. As a stateless society plagued even in pre-colonial times by severe land shortage, the socio-economic organization of Igbo communities has been characterized by high levels of mobility and institutions of inter-communal cooperation, fostering dynamic regional trading systems. With the coming of colonialism, the consolidation of a unitary Igbo identity was accompanied by a widening Igbo diaspora, creating commercial contacts with a greater range of Nigerian ethnic groups. Even during the Nigerian Civil War, what appeared to be a withdrawal into a more insular form of commercial and ethnic organization laid the foundation for new forms of informal economic cooperation with Nigerian as well as non-Nigerian ethnic groups. Throughout their history, cooperation across communal and ethnic cleavages has played a central role in Igbo economic survival and identity formation.

Although stateless and dispersed in pre-colonial times, Igbo communities 'were embedded in a variety of networks establishing translocal, regional,

and even more far-reaching connections without any overarching governing institutions' (Harniet-Sievers 2006:43). These connections, referred to by Silverstein (1983) as 'pan-Igbo' institutions, bound Igbo society together in a broad cultural and economic sphere despite the absence of a common ethnic identity. In the centuries before colonialism, cross-cutting institutions such as oracular religions, title societies and hometown-based occupational specialization linked Igbo communities together through trade, ritual and juridical practices. Secret societies, as well as the use of blood pacts (*igbandu*), ritualized friendship bonds and strategic marriages, contributed to expanding relations of trust, trade and commercial infrastructure outside the bounds of kinship and community (Isichei 1976:65; Northrup 1978:96–7; Dike and Ekejiuba 1990:290). Membership in elite societies such as *ojo* or *okonko* conferred what Oriji described as a 'Pan-Igbo passport' for safe passage through the fragmented territory of sometimes warring Igbo communities. Participation in such societies provided ritualized protection from attack, as well as supplying a ready infrastructure of resting houses and binding obligations for assistance across community lines (Onwuejeogwu 1981:67; Oriji 1982:533). Indeed, Northrup (1978:109) even cites a case of a European trader who joined a south-eastern Nigerian secret society in order to benefit from their effective debt collection machinery.

In the centuries before colonialism, this framework of trust and protection across community lines supported the development of a remarkable market infrastructure, including roads, currencies, credit systems and networks of local and regional markets. Credit networks, based on the 'trust system', operated across clan and even ethnic boundaries, linking Igbo communities with the trading peoples of the coast (Dike and Ekejiuba 1990:243–5). Through this institutional matrix of social relations, religious sanctions and economic infrastructure, the decentralized polities of pre-colonial Igboland were bound together by 'a dense network of tiny capillary veins' (Isichei 1976:67). These historical processes contributed to the development of indigenous economic networks that were not hampered by the limitations of primordial identities. On the contrary, what is most striking about the Igbo is their remarkable capacity for institutional innovation across kinship and community lines. Religious, associative and inter-community relations as well as ties of kinship and community coalesced into economic networks that contributed to the widening of social identities. The fact that neither the Igbo, nor the powerful Aro sub-group, constituted primordial ethnic identities testifies to this reality. The Aro emerged from a fusion of three ethnic groups, involving the Akpa, the Igbo and the Ibibio, melded into a single identity group through institutionalized political and economic organization (Dike and Ekejiuba 1990).

Clearly struck by the integrative social tendencies of commercial organization within the region, Northrup (1978:230) argues that:

> In southeastern Nigeria the long process of commercial development … occurred with little regard for large state structures or for national or ethnographic frontiers. … It was economics not ethnicity, trade not rulers which governed the main lines of this region's pre-colonial past.

The colonial era encouraged the consolidation of this socio-economic matrix into a unitary ethnic identity, while at the same time widening the sphere of Igbo economic operation. While the Igbo have historically had a significant presence among the coastal peoples of south-eastern Nigeria, their expansion into western and northern Nigeria took place largely in the context of colonialism. Propelled by economic and population pressures, the Igbo rapidly took advantage of new economic opportunities available across Nigeria, moving to locations across the country. Igbo groups migrated widely within the Igbo areas, but the bulk of migration was outside the Igbo hinterland to western and northern Nigeria, as well as to neighbouring countries such as Ghana, Cameroun and Fernando Po, giving rise to a new grouping known as 'the Igbo diaspora' (Onwubu 1975:404).

The Igbo diaspora created a network of Igbo inhabitants in nearly every corner of Nigeria. The 291 Igbos enumerated in Lagos in 1911 had risen to 31,887 by 1953. By the 1950s, there were 167,000 Igbos in northern Nigeria, making them the southern ethnic group with the highest population in the northern region (Anthony 2000:423; Isichei 1976:209). By the 1950s, there were substantial Igbo minorities in non-Igbo cities as far flung as Ibadan, Zaria, Lafia, Maiduguri, Gusau, Kafanchan and Makurdi. The 1953 census recorded that 15 per cent of the Igbo population lived outside Igboland, making the Igbo the largest migrant population in Nigeria, both in proportionate and absolute terms. As Anthony points out, the five most important Igbo political figures of the 1950s and 1960s were all either born or raised in northern Nigeria.

Silverstein (1983:130) argues that the rapid expansion of the Igbo diaspora was a product, not only of population pressure at home, but of the prior development of social 'blueprints for migration' in pre-colonial Igbo social organization. The organization of craftsmen and traders into itinerant groups with specialized territories created a framework for migration that did not rupture linkages between migrants and their home areas. Institutions requiring the annual return of migrants to their hometown for festivals had already begun to emerge in pre-colonial times (Dike and Ekejiuba 1990:216ff). As Silverstein (1983:355) shows in her study of Nnewi entrepreneurs, systems of apprenticeship also followed a diasporic pattern, in which masters settled

apprentices in other parts of Nigeria so as to widen their networks and avoid problems of oversupply in a given area.

These developments took advantage of opportunities provided by new colonial arrangements, but depended essentially on indigenous organizational efforts. While Igbo informal enterprise was tolerated by the colonial government, it was given little encouragement, and no real support. After Nigerian Independence in 1960, Igbo informal traders and producers became even more marginalized in the face of state efforts to promote the development of the formal economy. The Kilby Report on small-scale industry in Eastern Nigeria, based on fieldwork conducted in 1961, identified an active small-scale manufacturing sector that had essentially been left to 'shift for itself' (Kilby 1963:6). The Nigerian Civil War, from 1967 to 1970, intensified the role of self-reliance in the development of Igbo enterprise. Brautigam (1997:1006) and Forrest (1994:195–6) suggest that the Civil War encouraged a trend toward accelerated local industrialization in the context of the three-year siege of the Igbo State of 'Biafra', and the subsequent marginalization of the Igbo after their defeat. Even after the war, local self-help institutions, and a capacity for economic and social accommodation with other ethnic groups, played a central role in the recovery of Igbo enterprise, at home and in the diaspora.

Despite the traumatic experience of violent expulsion and defeat in a long civil war, high levels of Igbo out-migration were resumed soon after the end of hostilities, owing to the ongoing pressures of land scarcity, limited employment opportunities at home, and intense competition for economic advancement (Anthony 2002:228). While the government policy of 'no victor, no vanquished' facilitated relations of ethnic accommodation for returning Igbo migrants, the lack of state assistance in the process of reconstruction, combined with disadvantageous policies governing the economic reintegration of Biafra, crippled Igbo participation within the formal economy, intensifying their focus on informal systems of economic organization.

New Economic Frontiers: Igbo Informal Enterprise in Northern Nigeria

Faced with a devastated homeland and a lack of reconstruction assistance from the state, the Igbo turned to rebuilding their livelihoods through migration almost as soon as the war was over. This included a rapid return to northern Nigeria, where the violence against Igbos had been most severe. As Harniet-Sievers (2006:124) observed, 'The Igbo returned to Nigeria with surprising speed, the Igbo diaspora beginning to re-establish itself in Western and even in Northern Nigeria within a few months after the end of the

war.' For some years, investment strategies within the diaspora appeared more insular, as returnees and new migrants attempted to re-establish themselves economically and restrategize in the wake of the traumatic experience of their expulsion from the north. After their return, Anthony (2002:218) notes that Kano's Igbos 'chose to invest their personal wealth at home in Igboland rather than in their adopted cities'. However, Anthony also notes that, by the 1980s, after contributing to reconstruction in their home communities and securing fall-back housing at home, Igbo migrants began to build in Kano again. Moreover, the gradual re-establishment of Igbo hometown and ethnic associations in Kano, far from representing a shift toward ethnic insularity, regularly included non-Igbo members from southern minority groups who lacked sufficient numbers to form effective associations on their own.

In addition to living and investing in property in Hausa areas, Igbo traders were also engaging in increasingly structured commercial relationships with Hausa traders. While the trade in car parts has remained an essentially Igbo business, the trade in used clothing, pioneered in West Africa by the Igbo, expanded through cooperation between Igbo and Hausa trading networks. As Forrest (1994:181) explains, Igbo second-hand clothing importers based in Cotonou and Lomé extended the trade northward into Sahelian countries through contacts with Hausa traders. In a relationship of cooperation rather than competition, the vast Hausa trading systems of Sahelian West Africa became integrated into the second-hand clothing business as distributive networks for Igbo importers and traders. While the Igbo traders lacked the networks and commercial infrastructure to compete with the Hausa in the Sahel, the Hausa have, until recently, lacked the overseas networks to enter effectively into the import of used clothing. Conversely, Hausa dominance of the informal currency exchange business across most of Nigeria has been accompanied by cooperative relations with Igbo currency traders, who have maintained a monopoly on the business in Igbo areas (Hashim and Meagher 1999). Igbo traders regulate structural imbalances in the supply and demand for CFA francs in south-eastern Nigeria by routinely recycling currency through the Hausa-controlled informal currency market in Kano. Hausa and Igbo currency traders alike treat this as a form of structural collaboration, despite the interface of two ethnic monopolies in the same business.

As economic pressures built up in the wake of structural adjustment and the political machinations of an epileptic return to civilian rule, renewed conflicts between Igbo migrants and their Hausa hosts in northern Nigerian towns have been accompanied by symbiotic Igbo penetration into northern villages. Politically manipulated riots in the northern Nigerian cities of Kano

and Kaduna in 1991, 1995 and 2000, based on religion rather than ethnicity, resulted in the slaughter of thousands of Igbo migrants, and have encouraged some to abandon hopes of living peacefully in the north. But an equally common response to mounting economic and political competition in northern cities has been a migration of young Igbo entrepreneurs into large villages in search of new economic opportunities opened up by the economic realignments of structural adjustment. Strong communal training and credit networks, and a familiarity with life in the north, have equipped young Igbo entrepreneurs to seize new opportunities in large northern villages.

In the late 1990s, I conducted research on non-farm activities in a village of 12,000 inhabitants in Kaduna State, and found that three Igbo entrepreneurs had recently set up business there (Meagher 2001). Two had come to revive an abandoned bakery after the ban on imported wheat was lifted in 1992, making local bread production appear profitable again. One had come to open a branch of his brother's pharmacy, since the setting up of a private clinic in the wake of the 1996 meningitis epidemic had increased the demand for a local supply of medicine. These young men came to join another Igbo family who had been running a general provisions shop in the village for decades without incident. All of the Igbo residents found relations in the village congenial, and one of the recent arrivals, whose shop was the favourite hangout for village youth, had already been offered some land and was being encouraged by villagers to marry a local girl. Although both of these new Igbo ventures closed after only a few years, the reason in both cases was linked to the weakness of local markets in the wake of structural adjustment rather than to any problems in local ethnic relations.

In these various cases, social and commercial relations between Igbo and Hausa communities suggest a continued ability to 'build bridges' at the popular level. Ethnic specialization and integrative social processes have by and large created frameworks of social integration, which contrast sharply with the ongoing outbreaks of violence against Igbos in the north. On the one hand, the intensifying economic pressures of structural adjustment have begun to weaken some of the more integrative dimensions of Igbo–Hausa relations; on the other, political agendas of ethnic manipulation in elite struggles over oil resources continue to play a central role in outbreaks of violence. Despite recurring episodes of horrific slaughter of Igbos in the north, however, Douglas Anthony's (2002:33) reflections on the Civil War continue to ring true:

> The forced departure of Igbos from Northern Nigeria in 1966 was first and foremost a product of political and economic competition between elites. … left to their own devices, ordinary Nigerians would not – *could* not – have accomplished the horrors that they did under the influence of some of their leaders.

Informal Industialization in Igbo States

While the growth of an economically dynamic Igbo diaspora has continued unabated, the Civil War has also had the effect of stimulating a rapid growth of trade and local industry within the Igbo areas of Nigeria. At the epicentre of the Igbo manufacturing industry, the towns of Aba and Nnewi have been referred to as the 'Japan of Africa', while the term 'Aba made' has become a popular Nigerian expression for cheap local manufactures. There has been a tendency to link Igbo industrial dynamism to the economic incentives created by structural adjustment, but a number of scholars have shown that the conditions for local industrial development were laid over a decade earlier in the context of the Civil War. Tom Forrest (1994:196) points out that the war precipitated a sudden shift toward the repatriation of capital to Igbo areas for investment at home. The rapid injection of private capital from the diaspora, backed by a 'self-help' ethos of reconstruction, led to a boom in local industrialization within the Igbo states. Forrest (1994:148) emphasizes that:

> The rural industrialization of Anambra and Imo states owes little to government policies in any direct sense. It is the product of strong community ties, the loss of properties outside Igboland … and the need for security in the aftermath of the northern massacres and the civil war.

In its initial stages, the development of Igbo local industry looked like a withdrawal into ethnic exclusiveness. At home, most Igbo artisans, traders and businessmen had to make a new start after the war, owing to widespread destruction of assets, loss of property and the collapse of the Biafran currency (Forrest 1994:193). Igbo in the diaspora, especially traders operating in Cotonou and Lomé who had escaped the worst effects of the war, sent money home for investment in houses, trade and manufacturing. In Nnewi, the experience of the war gave rise to a collective decision that Nnewi businessmen should locate some of their activities at home, partly in response to the thousands of refugees from the North, and partly to take advantage of economic changes that arose during the war (Forrest 1994:161). Credit and capital from the Igbo diaspora was also critical to the setting up of local manufacturing in Aba. The support of Abiriba and Onitsha traders was particularly central to the development of the shoe and garment sectors in Aba, at the formal and the informal levels (Forrest 1994:171–5; Meagher 2006).

But the rise of Igbo manufacturing went hand in hand with a need for wider markets and new sources of labour. Following the takeoff of Igbo manufacturing in the early years of structural adjustment, the burgeoning cluster of shoe firms in Aba began to take on non-Igbo labour from nearby southern minority groups, largely through local apprenticeship institutions.

One shoe producer even claimed to have had a Yoruba apprentice. By the mid-1990s, a sizeable number of southern minorities headed firms within the shoe cluster, with their own specialized products. In interviews, non-Igbo shoe producers maintained that they experienced no disadvantages from being non-Igbo, and had been able to build up effective credit, supply and distribution networks with Igbo traders (Meagher 2004). In the informal garment industry of Aba, a taste for northern Nigerian and Sahelian fashions during the late 1990s precipitated a demand for Hausa embroiderers, who are far more skilled at embroidery than the Igbo. A sizeable Hausa quarter in the town of Aba hosted skilled embroiderers, who were hired on piece rates by local Igbo tailoring firms. Again, symbiotic relations prevailed, since the Aba tailors and workers lacked the skills for fine embroidery, and the Hausa embroiderers lacked the capital and local business knowledge to set up tailoring shops in the south-east. Similarly, Brautigam (1997) and Forrest (1994) highlight the central role of Igbo linkages with Taiwanese businessmen, who provided the machinery and the training for the setting up of local car parts production in Nnewi.

In both Aba and Nnewi, far-flung informal trading and transport networks played a crucial role in the widening of markets that underpinned the expansion of local manufacturing. Initially, Igbo traders with networks extending into West and Central Africa distributed locally produced goods to neighbouring countries, but already by the 1980s, Yoruba and Hausa traders were coming directly to Igbo towns to purchase goods for themselves. By the mid-1990s, traders from as far as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Zaire frequented the Aba shoe and garment clusters to purchase large consignments of goods. In the shoe cluster, francophone traders, known locally as 'Ca va', were prized customers owing to their tendency to purchase large orders, and a knowledge of French was considered an asset in the Aba shoe cluster.

Contrary to Nafzinger's (1968) claim that there is little scope for interaction between ethnic economic systems in Nigeria, Igbo shoe and garment producers regularly participated in credit relations with Yoruba and Hausa traders. Some Igbo shoe producers specialized in the type of cheap children's shoes popular among Hausa traders, creating a dependence on Hausa customers, and a constant interplay of credit relations. Indeed, one Igbo shoe producer claimed that he preferred granting credit to Hausa rather than Igbo traders. He explained that his Hausa customers were more likely to repay credit, while fellow Igbo customers tended to expect understanding for the many reasons why they could not (Meagher 2004). Interestingly, *national* origins had more of an influence than ethnicity on credit decisions. While the majority of Aba informal producers were happy to grant credit to customers outside their own ethnic group, a significant proportion in both

clusters were less willing to grant credit to non-Nigerians, who visited the cluster less frequently, and were too difficult to trace in the event of default.

By the late 1990s, the livelihoods of Igbo small-scale manufacturers were inextricably intertwined with the activities of non-Igbo traders and labour. As a result, a serious escalation of organized crime in the area precipitated the rise of a local vigilante group, the now notorious Bakassi Boys, to make the town safe for visiting traders (Human Rights Watch/CLEEN 2002). Alarming rates of robbery and murder, combined with an inefficient and corrupt police force, constituted a particular threat to local manufacturers and business people as they were beginning to frighten away out-of-town traders who had become the mainstay of demand for local goods. In fact, 98 per cent of informal shoe producers, and nearly 40 per cent of garment producers were dependent for the bulk of their sales on traders taking goods to other parts of Nigeria and beyond. It is not a coincidence that the incident said to have triggered the spontaneous formation of the Bakassi Boys vigilante group was the murder of a Calabar woman trader on her way to buy shoes in Aba. While the Bakassi Boys went on to become a violent tool of pre-electoral thuggery, they originated from the need for Igbo informal producers to make the town safe for non-Igbo traders coming in from other parts of Nigeria. Moreover, the transformation of the Bakassi Boys into a murderous militia involved the wresting of control over the vigilante group from the informal shoe producers who formed it. Over time, authority over the vigilante group was seized by top officials of the Igbo state governments, especially Anambra and Abia States, who sought to use the Bakassi Boys in the service of their own political agendas in the run-up to the 2003 and later the 2007 elections (Meagher 2007; Ukiwo 2002).

Once again, elite competition, rather than popular antagonisms, proved to be at the centre of the ethnic violence associated with the Bakassi Boys. In the process of their political takeover by Igbo state governors, the Bakassi Boys became involved in an ethnic riot in Aba – one of the first incidents in Nigeria in which the Igbos were the aggressors and the Hausas the victims. In February 2000, in retaliation against the killing of Igbos in the northern city of Kaduna in anti-Shari'a riots, the Bakassi Boys led an attack on the Hausa communities of Aba and other nearby towns. Over 300 northerners were killed, and many more had their property destroyed and were forced to flee to the police station for safety. Two things were particularly striking about this incident. The first was that the massacre of Hausa migrants was against the economic interests of the informal producers who founded the Bakassi Boys, and still made up a significant proportion of its membership. People from the north of Nigeria were frightened away from the town for

months, and many shoe and garment producers dependent on Hausa custom and Hausa skilled labour claimed that business did not return to normal for up to a year afterwards, undermining the livelihoods of local manufacturers. Indeed, the Aba riots dramatically exposed the widespread economic interdependence between the Igbo areas and the north. Not only were the livelihoods of local producers and traders hard hit by the riots, but local consumers across the town faced scarcity and threefold increases in the price of key foodstuffs, such as meat, tomatoes and onions, which are brought in by informal herders and traders from northern Nigeria. Created to make the town safe for strangers, the Bakassi Boys ended up chasing away the very people they were meant to protect, a fact noted and lamented by many Igbo residents at the time.

Perhaps even more perplexing was the extremely rapid return of the Hausa residents of Aba. Less than two weeks after the riots, Hausa migrants could be found chatting beside the wrecked mosque, the black smudges left by the burned bodies of their fallen brothers still visible on the road barely fifty yards away. I passed through the Hausa quarters every day during this period, and this remains for me one of the most chilling images of Nigerian identity politics. Part of the explanation for the rapid return of the Hausa community lies in the fact that many Hausa migrants had lived in the area for years, in some cases generations. Whatever the ethnic differences, Aba was their home, the location of their property and centre of their economic and social networks. Also important is the fact that the attack against them was led by only a small segment of society, made up largely of frustrated and under-employed youth whipped up by political propaganda – something the migrants themselves recognized. The vast majority of Aba's Igbo residents not only abstained from the violence, but protected Hausa friends and workers by hiding them from attackers, and came in a steady stream to the police station and Hausa quarters afterward to apologize, commiserate and bring food and clothing.

The repercussions of the Aba riots were addressed at a commercial as well as a communal level. A couple of weeks after the riots, the Kano shoe traders' union sent a delegation to the Aba shoe producers saying that they were not going to allow traders from Aba to do business in Kano until Aba was safe for Kano traders to return to. The Kano delegation, made up of Igbo as well as Hausa traders, claimed it was unfair for them to be prevented from trading in Aba because of insecurity while Aba people continued to trade in their markets in Kano. The leaders of the Aba shoe producers, who at that time still had some influence over the activities of the Bakassi Boys, gave assurances that Kano traders could return to Aba safely. After that, Hausa traders gradually began to resume trade with the Aba shoe cluster,

which at that time still housed the central office of the Bakassi Boys vigilante group. Although it took some time for trade with the north to return to normal, informal economic institutions provided effective channels for Hausa and Igbo informal business people to negotiate mutually acceptable solutions.

Conclusion: Formal Divisions, Informal Integration

Since the Nigerian Civil War, a politics of marginalization, grievance and ethnic competition has led to mounting concerns about the sustainability of Nigeria as a nation. Below the surface of these political struggles, however, increased Igbo participation in the informal economy has fostered more cohesive social and economic relations with other Nigerian ethnic groups. The objective of highlighting this paradox is not to give the impression that Nigeria's problems of social cohesion would be better handled by popular forms of governance, without interference from the state. This is manifestly not the case. As Douglas Anthony makes clear, in the aftermath of the Civil War the state policy of 'no victor no vanquished' played an important role in facilitating the reintegration of the Igbo into Nigerian society, supporting ideologically if not materially the self-help efforts of Igbo migrants. The objective here is rather to point out that the competitive ethnic mobilization currently practised at the political level is only one dimension of ethnic relations in Nigeria. Below the strategies of identity politics lie more integrative forms of organization embedded in popular social and economic practices, some dating back centuries, other emerging in response to new political and economic circumstances.

Recent literature on the 'uncivil' character of Nigerian society, and of African societies more generally, suggests that strong ethnic identities prevent Africans from forming collaborative links across ethnic cleavages (Fatton 1995; Ikelegbe 2001; Reno 2002). This interpretation is challenged by the realities of Igbo informal economic organization. Indeed, this account of informal economic relations between the Igbo and other Nigerian ethnic groups suggests that popular forms of social and economic organization contribute to the resilience of a multi-ethnic Nigerian society in the face of increasingly violent forms of identity politics. In the face of pessimistic assessments of the capacity of African societies to govern themselves, there is a need to draw attention to the existence of institutionalized forms of ethnic accommodation and conflict resolution operating under the surface of the state. Commentators on the informal economy have repeatedly argued that the institutional legacies of the informal economy provide important resources for meeting new organizational challenges. Informal forms of organization, as Grabher and Stark (1997:3) remind us, 'are not simple residues from the past but can serve as resources for the future'.

While offering cause for optimism, however, a realistic analysis of the role of the Igbo in contemporary national cohesion must also sound a note of warning. Even the underlying social fabric of informal ethnic collaboration can be torn apart by the mounting ethnic violence instigated by the political manoeuvres of Nigerian elites, including Igbo elites. Integrative forms of popular economic and social organization provide a measure of resilience in the face of divisive identity politics, but they cannot withstand current levels of conflict and violence indefinitely. Warning signs are already visible. Departing from previous patterns, the Igbo now launch counter-attacks in response to Hausa violence against them, and despite the rapid return of migrant communities after incidents of violence, a growing number of migrants are fleeing at the first sign of trouble, and some are returning home for good. All of these are indications that the tenacious fabric of Nigerian society is beginning to unravel in the face of increasingly savage political struggles among elites. If this continues, there will eventually be nothing to hold the pieces together. Just as institutions of inter-ethnic collaboration can become embedded in popular economic and social practices, ethnic antagonism and conflict can also become socially embedded. A state that fails to nurture informal forms of inter-ethnic cooperation will eventually destroy them.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 47–67

(ISSN 0850-3907)

Heroes and Villains: Ijaw Nationalist Narratives of the Nigerian Civil War

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Abstract

Numerous explanations of the failure of the Biafran enterprise highlight the absence of legitimacy and support for the Biafran effort among the Niger Delta 'minorities'. In the aftermath of the Civil War, popular narratives among the Ijaw, arguably Nigeria's fourth largest ethnic group, tended to tie them closely to the Federal side. In this paper, we examine the transformations of the relationship between Southern minorities and the Biafran cause, with a particular focus on the Ijaw. The fiscal centralization of oil resources that followed the war and the persistence of minority exclusion within the Nigerian polity have encouraged Ijaw elites, and other southern minorities, to review their commitment to Nigerian federalism. Conflicting tales of the Ijaw nationalist hero Isaac Boro testify to a growing 'revisionism' in interpretations of the Biafran War. Today the resurgence of militant forms of Ijaw ethnic nationalism, against the backdrop of oil community protests which have been taking place since the early 1990s, has given rise to new interpretations of the war, and the creation of new political linkages between Ijaw nationalists, other Niger Delta minorities and Igbo pro-Biafra movements. While resistance to Biafra catalyzed Ijaw nationalism in the fighting and aftermath of the Civil War, Biafra has now become a symbol of contemporary Ijaw nationalism. By drawing on new 'revisionist' histories of Biafra, this paper considers the complex interaction of ethnic nationalism, oil and secessionist conflict in Nigeria.

Résumé

De nombreuses explications de l'échec de l'entreprise du Biafra mettent en évidence l'absence de légitimité et de soutien à l'effort du Biafra chez « la population minoritaire » du delta du Niger. À la suite de la guerre civile, les récits populaires chez les Ijaw, sans doute le quatrième plus grand groupe ethnique du Nigeria, avaient tendance à les lier étroitement à la partie Fédérale. Dans cet

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article, nous examinons les transformations de la relation entre les minorités du sud et la cause du Biafra, avec un accent particulier sur les Ijaw. La centralisation fiscale des ressources pétrolières qui ont suivi la guerre ainsi que la persistance de l'exclusion des minorités de la politique nigériane, ont encouragé les élites ijaw et d'autres minorités du sud à revoir leur engagement en faveur du fédéralisme nigérian. Les histoires contradictoires du héros nationaliste ijaw, Isaac Boro, témoignent d'un « révisionnisme » croissant des interprétations de la guerre du Biafra. Aujourd'hui, la résurgence des formes militantes du nationalisme ethnique ijaw, sur fond de protestations de la communauté pétrolière, qui se déroule depuis le début des années 1990, a donné naissance à de nouvelles interprétations de cette guerre et la création de nouvelles relations politiques entre les nationalistes ijaw, les autres populations minoritaires du delta du Niger et les mouvements pro-Biafra Igbo. Bien que la résistance au Biafra ait catalysé le nationalisme Ijaw durant et à la suite de la guerre civile, le Biafra est maintenant devenu un symbole de nationalisme contemporain Ijaw. En s'appuyant sur de nouvelles histoires « révisionnistes » du Biafra, le présent article examine l'interaction complexe entre le nationalisme ethnique, le conflit pétrolier et sécessionniste au Nigeria.

Introduction

Coming to terms with the legacies of Biafra is as much about reimagining as about remembering. In current struggles in the Niger Delta, the Ijaw, arguably Nigeria's fourth largest ethnic group, have begun to see themselves as the heirs of Biafra. Although the Ijaw largely supported the Federal side at the time of the Civil War, *past Ijaw opposition to Biafra* is being replaced by a new identification with the image of Biafra in *contemporary struggles in the Niger Delta.* Today, *Ijaw revisionist narratives attempt to relocate the Ijaw more firmly in the Biafran fold, and greater links are being forged between Ijaw nationalist militants and the Igbo separatist organization MASSOB (Movement for Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra). From the perspective of the Ijaw, I will show why this historical revisionism makes political sense***.**

Yet, as a British-born Igbo, raised on distant stories of the Biafran War, of relatives killed and maimed before I was born, a different Biafra is in my head. Injunctions not to forget, intensified by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2007) momentous recent novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, struggle in my mind with revisionist Ijaw forms of remembering. *My reading of the Ijaw story, the actual and the revisionst versions, is imbued with a sense of what the French call 'parti pris' – a stake in the way the tale is told. In the search for the truth about Biafra and its meaning for contemporary Nigeria, it is important to recognize that this is one version of a story that an Ijaw narrator might have told differently.*

Numerous explanations of the failure of the Biafran enterprise highlight the absence of legitimacy and support for the Biafran effort among the Niger Delta 'minorities'. The Delta minorities were seen as the 'weakest link' in Ojukwu's strategic and military calculations, and were targeted as 'saboteurs' behind the Biafran front line. Prior to the 1990s, popular narratives among the Ijaw tended to tie them and other minorities closely to the Federal side. *This picture of resistance to Biafra is best summed up by the life and times of the celebrated Ijaw revolutionary, Issac Adaka Boro, who in February 1969 attempted to create an independent 'Niger Delta Republic' and who died fighting to defend the unity of Nigeria on the side of the Nigerian army (Nwajiaku 2006).* For many Ijaw elites and ordinary people alike, Isaac Boro paved the way for their ascent within the army, particularly after the erosion of the Igbo officer corps. With the Igbo emasculated militarily, it also provided a platform for their subsequent claims to being Nigeria's 'fourth largest ethnic group'. The war came to constitute a symbolic resource for the justification of the creation of Rivers State and its persistence as a terrain of Ijaw political domination between 1970 and 1996.

The intellectual production and political work of politicians, writers and academics also helped to institutionalize the 'memories' of Biafra as something southern minorities did not support. The campaiging activities of Harold Dappa Biriye, founder of the first Ijaw political party, the Niger Delta Congress, in 1956, and architect and servant of the Rivers State government-in-waiting during the war; the published works and political career of Ken Saro-Wiwa, founder of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MASOP) and Federal Administrator of Bonny during the war; and the work of Ikwerre writer, former soldier and teacher, Elechi Amadi, provided just some of a tapestry of minority narratives that suggest that minorities were peripheral, and often antogonistic, to the Biafran enterprise.

When twelve states were created just before the Civil War to replaced the four former regions, southern minority groups initially welcomed this move as a means of freeing themselves from Igbo political domination within the regional system. State creation was used as a tool for undermining possible minority support for Biafra. Yet since the war, an expanding oil economy, progressive fiscal and political centralization, and successive rounds of state creation have meant that the states whose creation minorities had long struggled for, lost fiscal and political autonomy. The target of minority political frustrations therefore shifted away from the regions to the centre, away from a specific focus on the once regionally powerful 'Igbo' to the 'wazobia' or majority-three ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa–Fulani elites, who, until 1999, controlled power at the Federal centre. This meant they also

controlled the ownership and distribution of oil revenues, from which the Delta minorities, despite the location of their homelands in the key oil producing region, have failed to benefit.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, minority political struggles had centred on how to eke out greater spheres of influence at the political centre – that is, how to become more effective clients of the most powerful ethnic groups. The political emasculation of the Igbo and the creation of states, notably Rivers State, with its expanded 'oil' capital Port Harcourt, emboldened the power of Ijaw from the eastern and parts of the central Delta, who came to constitute the largest minority group in the region and maintained a political culture of allegiance to 'the North', that is, to the Northern Hausa–Fulani political establishment. However, market reforms and intensifying economic hardship since the late 1980s have closed many of these avenues of advancement, and generated protests in the oil communities of the Delta, and a growing challenge to an Ijaw elite culture of accommodation with the Hausa–Fulani elite. Against this backdrop new interpretations of the war, and the role of the Ijaw in it, are emerging that emphasize their role and that of other minority groups on the side of the Biafran project.

As a result, remembering Biafra pulls Ijaw nationalists and other southern minorities in two different directions. The historical facts tell a story of Ijaw elites and their people opposed to Biafra and supportive of the Frederal Government and a united Nigeria. This reading sits uncomfortably with the widespread anti-Federal government undercurrent that informs contemporary minority nationalisms throughout the Niger Delta. As the first bold, albeit unsuccessful, attempt at secession the country has known, Biafra provides a template of 'resistance' from which present-day ethnic struggles seek to draw inspiration, as evidenced by the political links established as early as 2001 between the Ijaw Youth Council, under the leadership of Alhaji Asari Dokubo, and the militant Igbo-led organization, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), dedicated to reviving the Biafran project.

This paper's attempt to 'excavate' the past is evidently complicated by contemporary political struggles over oil. The role of oil in the Biafran War, not so much as the key driver of secession itself, but as an important motivation behind Biafran, Federal and international involvement in the conflict, further complicates matters. The centrality of oil today to minority struggles in the oil-producing Delta makes it difficult for popular narratives to divorce the Biafran project from a desire by the Igbo regional majority at the time to control the oil wealth. This links the idea of Biafra with ethno-regional struggles and the politics of oil, both then and now.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first looks at who the Ijaw were prior to the war – their sense of group consciousness and the nature of their political allegiances. This serves in part as an explanation of the content of the second part, which unravels the multiple narratives of the experiences of the Ijaw during the war. The third part places these narratives within the broader context of contemporary projects of Ijaw ethnic nationalism, and concludes with reflections on present reinterpretations of the past in the light of Ijaw alliances with today's Biafra project.

Ijaw Identity Before the War

Political Awakenings

Today in Nigeria, Ijaw broadly refers to a group of some 8–12 million people, scattered across the six states of Nigeria's Atlantic coastline, from Ondo State in the west to Akwa Ibom in the east. This explains their claim to being Nigeria's 'fourth largest' ethnic group and, although a minority in the Nigerian context, the largest minority group in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta region, and arguably in the nation as a whole. However, the Ijaw have not always been members of a single ethnic identity. The last two decades of oil-induced community uprising in the Niger Delta have consolidated the emergence of a broad-based pan-Ijaw ethno-nationalist consciousness among a swathe of people, speaking variants of some six related though not mutually comprehensible languages, with a diverse set of histories and social relationships with non-Ijaw groups and political cultures.

While today's vocal and vibrant Ijaw nationalism suggests the existence of a relatively homogeneous group, we would also emphasize the relatively recent character of pan-Ijaw ethno-political consciousness. Ijaw identity involves deep fissures that continue to divide the Ijaw based on a diversity of social and ecological histories, which have shaped the development of internal divisions and external relations with non-Ijaw groups within the Delta and beyond, particularly with the Igbo of the hinterland to the north of the Delta. Competition with the Igbo majority of Nigeria's Eastern Region has served as an important crucible for the emergence of an Ijaw nationalist identity.

The long histories of exposure to Europe since the sixteenth century, through the intermediary roles played by eastern and central coastal Ijaw as 'middlemen' in the trans-Atlantic trade in mainly hinterland Igbo slaves and later in palm oil products, created complex social and political institutions and strong 'city state' rather than specifically 'Ijaw' identities. These were particular to the coastal Ijaw whose creeks and rivers were mainly saltwater ones bordering the Atlantic coast in the central and eastern Delta (Nembe, Kalabari, Okrika, Ibani). This early 'exposure' to all things European paved

the way for the 'warrant chief'/'court clerk' role played by many of their elites in the early colonial administration. By contrast, many upland freshwater Ijaw communities in the northern parts of the central and western Delta had more in common with Igbo societies further north as sites of slave raids and later of palm oil production. In addition to being geographically closer to the Igbo hinterlanders, the freshwater Ijaw shared similarities in social and political structures leaving them open to caricatures of 'backwardness' in the eyes of Ijaw 'kin' from the more 'civilised' coast (Jones 1963).

The seeds of a pan-ethnic political identity, however, were gradually sown in the early 1930s and 1940s amid growing competition for influence and resources in the colonial administrative centre of Port Harcourt. Ijaw migrants and other Delta communities found themselves in competition for jobs, political influence and land with the vast numbers of Igbo migrants from the north of the Niger Delta. The sheer size of the Igbo migrant population to Port Harcourt changed the demographics of the town. This meant that political organization based on a pan-Ijaw communal identity alone would be insufficient to counter Igbo ascendancy. In the context of decolonization, the creation of three regional political units in 1946, each with an ethnically dominant 'majority' group and a large number of smaller 'minorities', became the crucible of trans-ethnic 'Rivers'/'minority' identities developed to do battle with the hinterland Igbo. Throughout the 1950s period of episodic deliberations over Nigeria's constitutional future, a Calabar-Ogoja-and-Rivers political identity also emerged, which included an even larger stretch of non-Igbo minority groups living in three provinces in the eastern region. Both minority political platforms used notions of cultural similarity to make a case for greater 'minority' autonomy vis-à-vis the politically and numerically dominant Igbo ethnic group that dominated the Eastern Region and controlled the largest political party, the NCNC, which also controlled the Regional government (Tamuno 1972).

Set up by the 1956/7 Conference to calm minority anxieties over majority domination, and pending independence, the Willink Commission of Inquiry into Minority Fears and Means of Allaying Them, marked an important turning point in the Ijaw political awakening. During and prior to the Willink Commission, pan-Ijaw, Rivers, intra-Ijaw and Niger Delta identities competed for space as the political platform of preference. The Willink Commission resolutely refused to accede to minority demands for state creation but designated the area to be covered by the Niger Delta Development Board as an 'Ijaw Special Area', which was carried out after the much-sought-after Port Harcourt and Ahoada had been excluded from it. Although the Ogoni were still included within the new Ijaw Special Area, Willink's recommendations brought to light new cleavages between the Ijaw and

non-Ijaw in Rivers Province, which grew after the eventual creation of a Rivers State in 1967. Many had long suspected the Ijaw of using 'Rivers' as a smokescreen for what was effectively an exclusively Ijaw political project. Not all Ijaw, however, supported the idea of creating a Rivers State, particularly the politically and economically powerful Kalabari chiefs who advocated a COR state (based on the boundaries of Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces) rather than a Rivers State per se.

After Willink, both the Western and Eastern Regional governments introduced a mixture of palliative and coercive measures to contain minority demands for state creation. In the East, the previous government clamped down on supporters of the Rivers State movement, and used the newly created second chamber, the Regional House of Chiefs (1957/8), to ensure compliance from chiefs and ordinary people at town and village levels. As a palliative gesture, new provinces out of the former divisions were also introduced. Willink's sop to minorities – the creation of a Niger Delta Development Board – was unable to promote the development of the Niger Delta region because it had no budgetary oversight and was reliant on the munificence of the Eastern and Western Regional governments in the form of grants. Political realism made it important to be seen to support the Eastern Government and not to be perceived as anti-Igbo, which would have meant denying oneself and one's constituents access to political patronage and public resources.

New rivalries emerged within the Rivers coalition. The Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference, led by Harold Dappa Biriye, who had championed the creation of the first Ijaw ethnic associations in Port Harcourt, and led the Rivers State creation cause, split into two factions. The larger faction, made up of chiefs and some younger educated men, opted for accommodation with the NCNC government. A smaller faction organized around a new party, the Niger Delta Congress (NDC), created by Dappa Biriye in May 1959, was opposed to any accommodation with the Eastern Region's NCNC government. The NDC formed an alliance with the a rival party in the Northern Region, the NPC (Northern People's Congress) prior to the 1959 Federal elections, ostensibly because the NPC 'promised', once in power, to create a Rivers State as a Federal territory.

Dappa Biriye's NDC managed to secure one seat in the 1959 elections, yet regionally the NCNC remained powerful, taking back the seat in 1964. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in Oloibiri district in 1956 may have given some Ijaw elites a 'renewed sense of indispensability', echoing memories of their central role in the slave and palm oil economies and a new sense of injustice for not being granted what was deemed to be owed to them (Eboreime 1992). At the time, it did not make political sense for them

to pursue an ethnically exclusive Ijaw nationalist agenda. Seeking Federal protection or support yielded little fruit, as the NDC, which had placed its hopes of greater autonomy in its alliance with the Northern Region's NPC, learnt to its cost after 1959 when its Northern ally formed a Federal coalition with the Igbo-dominated NCNC.

The NCNC government often rewarded Ijaw who were among the party faithful. Northern Ijaw, particularly among 'ethnically peripheral' groups like the Edoid-speaking Ijaw groups (Epie Atissa), tended to vote NCNC in elections, because their well-placed sons-of-the-soil were in the party and could extract generous grants. Deep party political cleavages, however, existed between elites from different villages and between NCNC and non-NCNC supporters. Those cleavages in parts of the Delta continue to this day. NCNC administrative reforms, the creation of county councils and of new chieftaincy stools, and the multiplicity of avenues for 'bringing the government closer to the people', ensured NCNC hegemony and control. Perceived party opponents (presumed NDC supporters) were the object of violent reprisals. NCNC patronage also upset traditional intra-Ijaw hierarchies, with formerly 'chiefless' societies being granted 'cheifly' status, allowing them to oust rival erstwhile overlords from the coastal city states and creating new intra-ethnic cleavages. Prior to independence, regional rather than central power determined the distribution of social goods. It made pragmatic sense for Ijaw elites to build cliental relations with the NCNC regional government. This was to change, however, as fiscal and political power gradually shifted towards the Federal centre after independence, particularly following the January 1966 military coup. Although initially an ideological stance, Harold Dappa Biriye's continued advocacy of an Ijaw special area directly administered by the Federal government, backed by closer ties with a Hausa–Fulani led central government, and an electoral pact with the NPC, were also pragmatic moves, in the light of the shift of power to the centre. In a similar vein, as we will see below, today's eponymous hero and Ijaw nationalist icon, Isaac Adaka Boro, advocated the same close ties, describing Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, as 'the protector of all Ijaws'. Yet while Harold Dappa Biriye, who until his death in 2005 continued to advocate an Ijaw–Hausa–Fulani alliance, attracted widespread vilification among Ijaw nationalists from the 1990s onwards, Isaac Adaka Boro has become an ethnic hero and icon for advocating essentially the same strategy. His saving grace was perhaps that he died young and 'on the battlefield' before the political realities changed.

Ijaw and the Unravelling of the First Republic, 1959–66

The lopsided political structure that existed prior to the Civil War, originally based on three powerful regions, created intractable problems of

ethno-regional competition and instability. While the larger Northern Region controlled a majority of seats within a central parliament, the two smaller Eastern and Western Regions jostled for junior partnership within a ruling coalition, entrenching ethnic and religious hostilities, which plagued and finally destroyed Nigeria's First Republic. As we have seen, tensions within each region between minority ethnic groups and ethnic majorities could be persistently exploited by rival political parties, each seeking to make inroads into the regional fiefdoms of the opposition, as a means of challenging their status at the political centre.

The prelude to the military coups of 1966 that dismantled the First Republic, and the descent to civil war in 1967 have been well rehearsed elsewhere. The critical points to emphasize here are that in the run-up to war, the Igbo and their leaders were initially advocates of Federalism, supporting the existing Nigerian system of strong regions and a weak centre. The Hausa–Fulani-dominated Northern Region, however, which controlled a majority of seats within a central parliament, had growing reasons to favour a stronger centre, particularly after the discovery of oil in the East cast the regional system of resource control in a new light. These underlying stresses, overlaid by increasingly ethnic interpretations of the two coups and the massacre of Igbo civilians in northern cities (along with many Ijaw and other Eastern minorities, generically perceived as Igbo in the North), culminated in the mass return of Igbos to the East and initial moves toward secession by the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, Lt General Ojukwu, in May 1967. Even then, Ojukwu initially claimed to be unilaterally implementing agreements reached in Aburi, Ghana to resolve the crisis, agreements on which he claimed the Nigerian Head of State, Lt Colonel Yakubu Gowon, had reneged.

The name Biafra was allegedly suggested by Frank Opigo, an Ijaw NCNC stalwart, but the vision for 'Biafra' was articulated by Eastern, mainly Igbo, intellectuals, who envisaged a new, self-reliant society. A number of Eastern intellectuals had returned to the East from Federal government posts and the Federal universities in Lagos and Ibadan, feeling their positions to be under threat owing to virulent political attacks by the Western Regional Government against 'Igbo over-representation' at the Federal level. The University of Nigeria at Nsukka became the intellectual hub of the 'Biafran' project. The pogroms against Igbos in the North and the frenzied return of refugees 'home' to the East added further ammunition to the idea of an independent Biafra (de St Jorre 1989:40).

Gowon attempted to counter Ojukwu's manoeuvres by institutinging a state of emergency, declaring a number of acts of the Eastern Region government illegal, and announcing the end to the regions and the creation of

twelve states. The Eastern Region was divided into three states, only one of which was controlled by the Igbo; the former Western Region formed three states, two of which were core Yoruba states; and the Northern Region formed six states, three of which were dominated by the Hausa–Fulani. To add insult to injury, the new Igbo state was landlocked. Three days later, on 30 May, Ojukwu officially declared the independent 'Republic of Biafra' (Williams 1982:31). Federal troops invaded Biafra on 17 July 1967, beginning a civil war that finally ended when Ojukwu fled to Côte d'Ivoire, and Major-General Philip Effiong, his Chief of Staff, surrendered on 12 January 1970.

Ijaw Reponses to Coup, Counter-Coup and War

Although many prominent Ijaw elites were part of the NCNC political establishment, Ijaw nationalist narratives today emphasize their opposition to the Eastern Regional Government, as epitomized by the life and works of Isaac Adaka Boro. The selective 'cutting and pasting' of Boro's story and debates among the Ijaw about the content of his legacy also reflect deeper divisions among Ijaw nationalists today over strategy. On the one hand are those in favour of tying Ijaw fortunes to an alliance with Hausa–Fulani elites and who deplore revolutionary tactics, and on the other lie those who advocate an end to Hausa–Fulani alliance-building in favour of a strategy of armed struggle.

Aspects of Boro's life appeal to both sides, yet it is for the advocates of regional autonomy possibly culminating in a break with 'One Nigeria', that Boro's legacy is the most problematic. While Ijaw advocates of local autonomy and resource control are now eager to build bridges with emergent Biafra revivalist movements, like MASSOB, they have adopted a hero whose life strikes at the heart of what Biafra stood for. The Biafran struggle for secession contrasts with Boro's loyalty to the Federal army, raising important existential questions for Ijaw nationalists who vilify the Nigerian Federal government for having appropriated and squandered the petroleum resources of the Niger Delta. Yet Boro's revolutionary credentials, military prowess and stance on the question of local ownership of petroleum resources also make him a useful heroic figure for contemporary Ijaw nationalist champions of 'resource control'.

Although Boro's story is just one of many, its prominent place in Ijaw nationalist 'official history' makes it worthy of particular consideration. Isaac Adaka Jasper Boro was born on 10 September 1938 in Oloibiri, Ogbia district, the son of Pepple Boro, the headmaster of the only mission school in Oloibiri at the time. In the early 1940s, he moved with his parents to Port Harcourt before settling in Kaiama, the native town of his father, who took up the post of headmaster at the Reverend Proctor Memorial School. Kaiama was a major centre for the freshwater Kolokuma and Opokuma Ijaw in Brass division, later Yenagoa Province, and the first Ijaw town outside the coastal eastern Delta to

have gained access to missionary education. From an early age, Boro's outlook, like that of many of those who later became Ijaw nationalist leaders, was informed by an experience of travel throughout the Delta. After secondary schooling in Warri, a brief stint as a teacher and later in the police force, in 1961, he obtained a two-year scholarship from the Eastern Regional Government. Boro enrolled at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) to read chemistry. His experience of student politics at UNN, where the prized position of Student Union President, who controlled a budget of £5,000, was hotly contested, profoundly marked his political outlook. In his posthumously published 'autobiography', Boro claims that 'tribalism', which relegated the Ijaw to the position of 'strangers' within their own region, was the cause of his two consecutive but failed attempts at becoming Student Union President (Tebekaemi 1982:47). In spite of the 'tribal onslaught' and a majority Igbo electorate, Boro managed to get himself elected in the post in 1964.

The position gave him privileged access to politicians within the Eastern Regional Government who were keen to use him to 'organize' opposition to the 1964 Federal Elections but were reluctant to countenance the idea of the creation of a state for the Niger Delta, which he wanted to be 'strictly … occupied by the Ijaws' (Tebekaemi 1982:57). He described 'The North' as the only true 'benefactor' of the Ijaw (Tebekaemi 1982:55). Upon graduating from UNN in 1965, Boro moved to Lagos, where with fellow Kaiama son, Samuel Owonaro (son of the first Ijaw person to write a 'History of the Ijaw), and Nottingham Dick, he founded a political movement, called the Integrated WXYZ, which advocated greater control of the benefits of oil wealth for the Ijaw.

After toying with the idea of reformist politics, Boro claimed that the killing of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, whom he described as the 'protector' of all Ijaws, and the installation of the Igbo officer, Major General Aguyi-Ironsi, convinced him that revolution was the only way out for the Ijaw. Boro advocated a rejection of the new regime, which he told his followers to have nothing to do with (Tebekaemi 1982:122). From 22 January 1966, Boro, Owonaro and Dick returned home and began to recruit young men between the ages of 18 and 33 to join the Niger Delta Volunteer Service. A camp was opened behind his father's compound in Kaiama, in Taylor Creek, a tributary of the River Nun. In three week some 120 recruits were enlisted. These were instructed to seize all motor boats belonging to the Nigerian Government and oil companies but not to harm any expatriate worker (Tebekaemi 1982:18). After less than a month of training in guerrilla tactics with funds raised through the seizure of goods from illicit gin sellers, accompanied by the stockpiling of explosives, which were easy to acquire because they were widely used by the oil industry and available in local

markets, and contacts established in Yenagoa, Ahoada, Degema, Oloibiri, Patani and Bomadi, Boro's Niger Delta Volunteer Service launched its offensive to establish the Niger Delta Republic on 23 February 1966.

After a swearing-in ceremony in English and 'Ijaw', using a mixture of Christian benediction ritual and indigenous Egbesu purification rites, a declaration of independence was read out. Eastern Regional Government and Federal institutions including police stations, outposts of the Niger Delta Development Board and schools, were subsequently closed down and the declaration read to state officials. Most non-Ijaw administrators, notably the military-appointed Sole Administrator of Yenagoa Province, fled. Many non-natives also left from what had previously been the multi-ethnic provincial headquarter town of Yenagoa. Boro was explicit about his desire to reclaim the Niger Delta for the Ijaw alone. State administrators of non-Ijaw origin were particularly singled out for punishment 'for the sins of (their) Race'. The looting of non-Ijaw shops in Yenagoa was actively encouraged, and referred to as the collection of a 'non-Ijaw tax' (Tebekaemi 1982:127). After just twelve days the revolution was quashed, and Boro and his men arrested and imprisoned for treason.

In spite of Boro's stated objective to use the revolution to resist at all costs what he perceived as an illegal Igbo-led coup, others have suggested that Boro's efforts were more of a provocation than a genuine succession attempt. Ruth First argues that Boro and his men were in league with senior Northern officers, and had wanted to use the threat of revolution to trigger the imposition of a state of emergency by the Northern-led Federal government prior to the first coup. Boro himself admitted to being close to the Tafawa-Balewa government, and having little sympathy for the government of the Eastern Region. However, by the time Boro's revolution saw the light of day, the national political landscape had been so drastically altered that even if a Northern-sponsored state of emergency had been the original plan, it was no longer feasible. In the end, Boro's revolution was a last-ditch attempt to show that the Niger Delta was snubbing the Igbo-led military regime established after the first coup. Commenting on the likelihood of success, Boro declared, 'As for success, it was … better to call the attention of the world to the fact that the inhabitants of the Niger Delta in Nigeria were feeling very uncomfortable. … Let the success be a magnanimous grant from Lord Providence'.

The July 1966 coup changed the situation once again. In August 1967, one year and six months after their initial campaign, Boro, Owonaro and Dick were granted clemency and all joined the Nigerian army, in Boro's words to 'free people from Biafran occupation'.[1] Ijaw migrants from as far away as Ghana, who had been expelled by the Busia government and were

stranded in and near Lagos, also joined up. Isaac Boro was given ample scope to recruit his own force of some 1,000 'ill-disciplined, hurriedly and poorly trained Rivers men', who joined the Third Marine Commando Division in Bonny (Obasanjo 1980:47). While Samuel Owonaro and Nottingham Dick stayed with half the recruits in Bonny (the latter subsequently lost his life there), Boro and the remaining recruits, equipped with sophisticated 23-calibre rifles, joined the rest of the Third Marine Commando Division, and took part in the Calabar landing operation, known as 'Operation Tiger Claw' – a name by which Boro's men subsequently became known.[2]

After a number of much-celebrated victories against the Biafran forces, Boro died in 1969, shortly before the war ended, provoking much controversy about the circumstances of his death. Some claim he died in battle in Bonny or in Port Harcourt, while others suggest he was murdered by his commanding officer, Col. Benjamin Adekunle, who was jealous of Boro's rapid rise within the army – a story that resonates with contemporary Ijaw feelings of Yoruba and Federal government treachery in dealings over oil resources. Calls for a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding Boro's death are regularly made, particularly around 15 May, the anniversary of his death, during which ritualized processions to Kaiama from all over the Niger Delta take place, amid week-long festivities.[3] Yet while the presence of Ijaw members of the armed forces at his anniversary ceremonies emphasizes the iconic figure of Bor as the Federal Soldier victorious against the Biafra secessionist, Ijaw nationalists are keen to highlight the important role the Ijaw and other minorities played on the Biafra side during the war. Ijaw nationalist militant Alhaji Asari Dokubo, who models himself as Boro's heir, before his arrest in 2005 openly expressed a commitment to the break-up of Nigeria (Amaize 2005). In 2002 he claimed that Boro's death was caused by the wrath of the Ijaw gods, angry that he had left behind the struggle to fight instead on the side of the Nigerian Government, which he had initially fought to undermine. Boro was doing something *contre nature* and therefore paid the heavy price for it.[4] It is now difficult to get at any 'truth' surrounding the actual circumstances of Boro's death. What is most important about these accounts is how they 'frame' Boro, his life and death, as an important plank in the history of the 'Ijaw nation' as a whole. The speculation and controversy surrounding his death further reinforce his hagiographic status.

Ijaw Elites and the Creation of Rivers State

Resistance to the first military coup and to the declaration of Biafran secession also took more conventional constitutional forms, epitomized by the path trodden by Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye, Ijaw leader of the Niger Delta Congress Party. Initially obliged to work with the Eastern government in

fear for his own life and safety, he kept channels of communication open with the Federal Government and subsequently moved to Lagos to become part of the Rivers State government 'in exile'. Dappa-Biriye, like Boro, saw the way forward through an alignment with the Northern political elite, but distanced himself from Boro's attempted revolution, later claiming that 'he was too young … to bring near'.[5] This did not prevent Dappa-Biriye from being placed under house-arrest after Boro's revolution was crushed because he was perceived as being linked with him and therefore a security risk. The desire of the Gowon military government to stifle the establishment of a Biafran republic created a new opportunity for Biriye to pursue his ambition for the creation of a Rivers State.

On 3 August 1966 Ojukwu made a speech implying the 'inevitability' of the break-up of Nigeria. On 31 August 1966 he organized the first Consultative Assembly in Enugu, ostensibly to enable minorities in particular to express their views 'frankly on matters that vexed' them (de St Jorre 1972:71). Initially 'representatives' from Rivers (Province) were hand-picked, but after some protest, communities were allowed to select their own representatives. Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye was one of the prominent Rivers intellectuals and professionals present who were predominantly Ijaw (coastal Kalabari, Okrika and Bonny) and Ikwerre. He openly expressed his desire to see the creation of Rivers State. Ojukwu, like Willink a decade earlier, argued that provincial administration and provincial assemblies would suffice to meet minority concerns without necessitating the creation of states. Little indication was given of how the assemblies would be staffed and how funds would be allocated to them.

The issue of states resurfaced at the adjourned Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in Lagos and then at a second Consultative Assembly meeting in Enugu on 4 October 1966. This time 'people with doubtful loyalties were excluded' (Okara 1970 [rpt 2001]). Ojukwu gave the impression that he was acquiescing in the idea of state creation as long as it was not built on 'hate, fear and spite', that is, was not anti-Igbo. Many Eastern minority intellectuals, particularly those who were known to favour the creation of a Rivers State, started to feel the pressure to conform to Ojukwu's agenda. The Ikwerre writer Elechi Amadi, a former naval captain turned teacher, maintains that from September 1966 onwards 'detention camps sprung up all over the region' (Amadi 1973:20). He also claims that Ojukwu 'over used' photographs of the massacres to manipulate public opinion in the East and buoy up secessionist feelings on the part of the Igbo and minorities who had also been forced to return from the North, creating a refugee crisis.

On 27 May 1967, Ojukwu organized another forum, the Eastern Consultative Assembly, to which he invited 'all the chiefs and opinion leaders of the Eastern minorities', and during which he received a message from

Gowon, who indicated that he would create new states if Ojukwu carried out his threat to secede. According to Elechi Amadi, one of the delegates, many minority leaders expressed fears of a Biafran state in which they would remain dominated by Igbos, but Ojukwu claimed that 'Easterners' gave their support (Amadi 1973:17). Common to Amadi's, Saro Wiwa's and other 'minority' accounts (Saro-Wiwa 1989:42) is the conviction that Ojukwu did not make sufficient attempts to stave off war but used the attacks on Igbos in the North, harrowing though they were, to justify a secessionist course on which he was already embarked long before the massacres took place. Of the killing and maiming of Igbos in Northern towns and cities between July and September 1966, Amachi comments, 'the casualties were carefully photographed and documented' (Amadi 1973:15).

In the wake of the 29 July 1966 coup, Dappa-Biriye organized a group of minority politicians, businessmen and intellectuals, who subsequently became known as the 'Leaders of Thought of the Rivers People'. They met regularly in Port Harcourt with a view to developing a proposal for state creation. S.N. Dikibo, a Kalabari Ijaw lawyer, chaired the group. Ken Saro Wiwa, then a part-time teacher and postgraduate student at the University of Ibadan, was responsible for drafting the memorandum for a future state within a twelve-state arrangement (Williams 2000). The memorandum was signed by representatives of the six divisions in Rivers Province (Degema, Ahoada, Port Harcourt, Ogoni, Brass and Opobo), published on 14 September 1966 and presented by a Niger Delta Delegation, which included Dappa-Biriye, E.J.A Oriji and W.O. Briggs to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference called by Gowon to discuss the future of the Federation (Okara 1970 [2001]:10). Dappa-Biriye presented his memorandum to the Northern political establishment who accepted it.[6]

When Gowon announced the creation of twelve states, Alfred Papapiriye Diete-Spiff, an Ijaw from Nembe/Brass (central Delta coastal saltwater) was appointed Military Governor of Rivers State. But the new Rivers state did not fulfil the dreams of Biriye's former Niger Delta Congres. It did not include Opobo division, which became part of South-Eastern State, nor the Western Ijaw, who stayed in the Mid-West Region/State. The creation of states, however, encouraged many Ijaw and other Niger Delta minority elites to rally together around the idea that they were all 'Rivers people' and that the state was created for them.

Supporters of Circumstance and Saboteurs

Many top Ijaw civil servants in the Eastern Region found themselves in a difficult position once the Republic of Biafra was declared in May 1966. Some resigned and were subsequently imprisoned with other minorities. Many

of those who had been actively involved in promoting a Rivers State were particularly targeted. Chief E. J. A. Oriji, who had presented the memorandum on State Creation at the Ad Hoc Constitutional Committee in September 1966, was tortured in detention. Most minority civil servants bit their lips and continued working. Amadi contends that 'their presence in the rebel camp provided the secessionists with a powerful argument against the minority issue' (Amadi 1973:42). Ignatius Kogbara, a prominent member of the Ogoni elite, was a member of the Biafra Public Service Commission and later Biafran Ambassador to the UK (Okonta 2002:159–60). Obi Wali, an Ikwerre, was originally hostile to Ojukwu's Biafran project but later became part of Biafra's propaganda machine. Okoko Ndem, an Efik, broadcast humorous and popular programmes on Radio Biafra. He swapped sides after the capture of Radio Biafra in 1968.[7] Most Ijaw supporters of the Biafran cause had been NCNC stalwarts. After the war they justified their actions by claiming that if they had not been there (on the Biafran side) they would not have protected the interests of 'their people' while allowing the storm to pass. After the war former NCNC regional House of Assembly member, Frank Opigo, was seen as a traitor feathering his nest, was almost lynched and had to go into hiding.[8]

Yet within Biafra, minorities that chose to support the effort continued to arouse suspicion. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel is replete with references to persistent suspicions of minority commitment to the Biafra cause, constantly hounded for being saboteurs but equally instrumental in sustaining the Biafran effort, as professionals or fighters on the frontline. Adichie, while sympathetic to the Biafran cause, critically explores how the saboteur syndrome was exploited politically, as a convenient way of dealing with all forms of political opposition to Ojukwu and shielding Biafrans from disillusionment with a failing and costly war enterprise. Ojukwu's persistent search for 'saboteurs' enabled him to explain away Biafran setbacks and defeats, suppress rivals and maintain control of power and weapons. Even Igbo Biafran soldiers were targeted (Madiebo 1980). The extent to which Wamo Weli-Wegbe's claim of a systematic *plan* by the Igbo to exterminate all minorities existed is difficult to ascertain, but finds resonance among some Ijaw nationalists (Oguoko:249). In 2001, Weli-Wegbe's views, which were first expressed as conference proceedings in 1970, were published once again. This was at the same time as the Oputa Panel into Human Rights Abuses in Nigeria received submissions from Igbo delegations about atrocities committed against the Igbo during the civil war. Unsettled scores between minorities and their Igbo neighbours provide a backdrop to current tensions between the Igbo and Eastern minorities. These are being replayed in the

context of oil community protests that pit 'indigenes' against 'strangers' and challenge oil companies to end 'majority' (read Igbo) domination of the oil and oil servicing industry from which minorities feel they have been excluded.

Rivers State has been numerically and politically dominated by the Ijaw since its creation in 1967 and following its division in 1996 into Rivers and Bayelsa States. Against this backdrop post-war Ijaw narratives have long suggested that the Ijaw did not support Biafra but rather the One Nigeria agenda of the Nigerian Federal government. During the war itself, Isaac Boro's legacy of opposition to the Igbo-dominated Eastern Regional Government was the prevailing ideology within the Biafran leadership. The Kolokuma-Opokuma clan area, in which the town of Kaiama is situated, was targeted because it was perceived by the Biafran regime as a bastion of anti-Biafra sentiment. For this reason as well as because of 'Boro's legacy', many Kaiama boys escaped to join the Federal forces. In Anyama, in today's Southern Ijaw LGA, resistance to Biafra is etched on to popular memory with a play enacted yearly to dramatize how the *Izon* sank Biafran boats.

Village-level case-study research, however, reveals a different, less black-and -white picture of the Ijaw and war. 'Support' for Biafra in ideological terms even among those deemed to be part of the prototypical Biafra constituency, shifted as the war progressed. Even those ideologically committed to the war, in contexts of scarcity did what was necessary to survive – many avoided conscription, and traded over enemy lines. The so-called 'attack trade' ('Afia-attack) involved trading groups who for centuries had traded across the northern parts of the Delta and Igbo hinterland. How active ideological support or resistance to Biafra could have been was also circumstantial, affected by how close one was to the frontline or where one was when the war broke out. Many Ijaw teachers from the central Delta were caught in Owerri and Enugu when war struck. Owerri was captured and recaptured by both sides. Many found ways to avoid conscription into the Biafran army trekking over huge distances and swimming across rivers where necessary. Chief Abule, then a primary school teacher and today paramount ruler of Oporoma, in Southern Ijaw recounts how he escaped from Owerri by playing dumb. 'We pretended to be fools … when they said "about turn", we would sit down … when they asked "what is the time?", we would say "the long hand of the clock is on top of the small hand" … they would then say "Come on, get out … these are bush people". … So we managed to escape conscription and the sudden killing of soldiers..[19] Abule later moved to Lagos and 'became an errand boy for the Rivers State Government' in exile.

Most young men from Yenagoa Province fled to Ekeremor and Sagbama, which were then part of Western Ijaw division in the Mid West Region, or to

Lagos. On arrival, some squatted there with Ijaw refugees who had been forcibly repatriated from Ghana. Frustrated by their insecure status, many joined the Federal Army. Others moved to Ajegunle on the outskirts of Lagos – an area with a long history of exchange with Ijaw communities further east in the Niger Delta and the site of many early Ijaw settlements along the creeks.

Yet many Ijaw living outside the frontline areas stayed put and at one time or other were 'roped in' to the Biafran effort. The Edoid-speaking Epie from Yenagoa (who are now considered by Ijaw nationalists to be part of a pan-Ijaw ethnic family even though their language is more like Edo/Benin languages than any of the Ijaw languages), situated at the gateway to the riverine Delta (Southern Ijaw) were of strategic importance during the war to the Biafran forces stationed in nearby Mbiama junction. Many Epie and Atissa (similarly Edoid-speaking) made money through the 'attack trade' using subterfuge to bypass blockades on Biafra imposed by the Nigerian Federal forces stationed in Yenagoa itself. Igbo women traders from towns and villages to the north of the Delta, using old networks, entrusted large amounts of money often hidden in dug-out canoes to Epie intermediaries. After the capitulation of Port Harcourt in September 1968, Biafran forces clamped down on the Epie and Atissa, who were suspected of being saboteurs. Able-bodied men were taken from villages to refugee camps in Ahoada and tortured. They were only released after the intervention of known Epie supporters of the Biafra cause, such as former NCNC stalwart, Chief Mabinton (Eboreime 1992:86).

Just as Ike Okonta's (2002, 2007) work has shown that Biafra was an opportunity for the Ogoni to recast themselves in a new and more powerful political light, many Epie and Atissa youth, like other 'micro-minorities', desperately sought to join the Biafran effort. For them, the Biafran army offered a vehicle for upward social mobility in a context in which they found themselves persistently outdone by their *Ijaw-proper* 'brothers' who tried to absorb them ideologically while keeping them at the margins politically and economically because they were 'not quite' Ijaw. Like many Ogoni, they were not keen on a Rivers State, which would have meant their continued domination and political marginalization by larger 'minority' groups like the Ijaw.

Individual support for Biafra among political elites was not determined by ethno-political loyalties, but by past trajectories. Long-standing political differences between villages exploded during the war and conditioned relations between whole villages that continue today. Most people in the Kolo/Emeyal area in Ogbia division of Yenagoa Province were opposed to Biafra ideologically; but the most influential figures in the villages, notably those in the military who had been called back to the Eastern Region after the July

coup and the massacres that followed, joined up with the Biafran army as a vehicle for speedy promotion. In the village of Emeyal, elites had been very pro-NCNC and supported Biafra. The neighbouring village of Imiringi had been very pro-NDC and supported Isaac Boro's secessionist movement in February 1966. Imiringi was consequently particularly at risk from Biafran reprisals because it was seen as a den of support for Isaac Boro. Heavy fighting took place in Emeyal between the Nigerian and Biafran forces. Influential local elites who had been NCNC supporters were severely sanctioned by the Nigerian army. Their houses were damaged while those accused of 'betrayals' were often slaughtered. When people ran away from Emeyal, people from the neighbouring village of Kolo looted their houses. This created subsequent problems between the two villages, which were further exacerbated by the oil finds of the 1970s in the Kolo Creek area.[10]

Concluding Remarks

Where does this leave us? What I have tried to do is present a picture of the multiple Ijaw experiences of the Biafran War, on both sides of the frontline, with some examples of how particular individuals by force or volition switched sides at particular moments. Forty years on, amid their own struggles with the Nigerian state, many of the Ijaw who fought on the Federal side against Igbo domination now look to Biafra as a symbol of Ijaw nationalism.

Oil community protests against the Federal government began in the early 1990s with Ken Saro Wiwa's MOSSOP. Since then these struggles have given rise to a number of Ijaw nationalist groups, cuminating most recently in the formation of MEND – the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta – a hydra-headed, largely Ijaw-led, armed militant movement, with multiple open conflicting objectives and strategies. These ethnic nationalist movements have changed the social and political geography of the Niger Delta, turning Biafra from a threat into an icon of liberation

As early as 1993, Ken Saro Wiwa was already 'extending a hand of friendship' to Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, the pan-Igbo socio-cultural organization, requesting support for his movement. By 2002, Alhaji Asari Dokubo, then President of the Ijaw Youth Council, had already begun to build political links with the militant Igbo organization MASSOB. In September 2005, both Dokubo and MASSOB's leader, Ralph Uwazurike, were arrested and charged with treason. Dokubo was released in June 2007, and rearrested in December 2007. To understand the impetus behind these new political shifts and the reworking of historical memories that they are generating, one needs to look at these movements (IYC, MEND, MASSOB) not simply as 'ethnic movements' but as 'generational' challenges to the status quo – a critique of

strategies pursued by elites from each ethnic group, and an attempt to reverse them. Interestingly, it is the radical political strands within ethnic nationalist movements that have tended to sign up to the Biafran agenda, represented by MASSOB. It is not without significance that appeals have also been made to other Niger Delta minority groups by MASSOB to join their struggle and build common cause around their opposition to a centrally controlled federalism that allows little room for minority autonomy. The prevalence of 'minority narratives' among the Igbo, who rail against their 'minority' status within the Wazobia triad has also created space, at least conceptually, for the 'coming together' of Igbo and minority causes.

In a context of increasing popularization of the Biafra story among disenfranchised Igbo youth, it is difficult to tell just how far strategic alliances between MASSOB and Ijaw/Niger Delta minority nationalism will go. The search for common ground needs to contend with persistent inter-ethnic tensions that pull both groups in different directions. Patterns of intermarriage, historical ties and even shared memories of support for Biafra may exist, but gripes between Igbo and Ijaw remain unresolved – 'abandoned' properties in Port Harcourt after the war, Igbo positions in the oil and oil-servicing industry', the politics of indigeneity, which creates differential citizenship rights for migrant settlers and native populations of states and local government areas in a context of high rates of internal migration, are just some of a list of sticking points.

The purpose of excavating these narratives is not to arrive at a single truth about the war, if at all one exists. Truth alone would not help to heal the wounds opened by war, nor does it explain the new meanings drawn from the war by other marginalized groups within Nigerian society. While the Biafran War did not reshape Nigeria, its impact on Nigerian political and societal imaginary is less well understood. The aim of this paper has been to open up a discursive space around silenced aspects of Nigeria's and Biafra's history, making it possible to explore the ways in which memories of Biafra have been reworked into new political messages. Given the highly fragmented Nigerian and Niger Delta landscape, with high levels of inter- and intra-ethnic antagonism, rethinking Biafra may pave the way for the rebuilding of bridges between erstwhile 'enemies', crystallizing new alliances and new struggles for a more just and inclusive state.

Notes

1. Interview with Samuel Owonaru, July 2002, Kaiama.
2. Interview with Patrick Naagbaaanton, Ogoni journalist, July 2002, Port Harcourt.
3. Hosiah Emmanuel, 'Who Killed Adaka Boro?', http://www.unitedijawstates.com/boro.htm.

4. Interview with Marlin T. Marlin (Director of Intelligence under Dokubo-led IYC), 31 May 2002, Port Harcourt.
5. Interview with Harold Dappa Biriye, 2 July 2002, Port Harcourt.
6. Interview with Chief Harold Dappa Biriye, March 2002, Port Harcourt.
7. Interview with Patrick Naagbaanton, July 2002, Port Harcourt.
8. Interview with O. A. Egberipou, August 2002, Port Harcourt.
9. Interview with H. R. H. Chief Abule, Paramount Chief of Oporoma, 20 April 2002, Oporoma, Bayelsa State.
10. Interview with Chief Atata, 28 June 2002, Imiringi, Bayelsa State.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 69–82

(ISSN 0850-3907)

Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War: Lessons not Learned

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Abstract

In African contemporary history, Biafra is not only remembered as one of the worst humanitarian crises on the continent, but also as a tragedy that gave rise to the concept of *ingérence* or the international responsibility to protect. Unfortunately, the controversies about the impact of aid during the conflict have been forgotten. Today, the humanitarian legend of Biafra celebrates the saving of starving children and the birth of the famous NGO *Médecins sans Frontières*, but it does not acknowledge the military impact of relief operations that helped the secessionists continue the war for over a year after it was lost militarily. As it prolonged the suffering of local populations, relief was a matter of discussion during and just after the war. Since then, this strategic debate has been 'lost in translation'. This paper will argue that the contemporary idea of humanitarian aid that advocates a right of intervention in order to save innocents confuses the issue for at least two reasons. First, it leads us to think wrongly that Biafra gave birth to the concept of an international responsibility to protect, something that had existed previously. Secondly, it overshadows the dark side of humanitarian aid, where international intervention often assists belligerents rather than civilians, prolongs suffering, and poses new threats to national sovereignty.

Résumé

Dans l'histoire contemporaine de l'Afrique, on se souvient du Biafra comme l'une des pires crises humanitaires sur le continent, mais aussi comme une tragédie qui a donné naissance à la notion d'*ingérence* ou la responsabilité internationale de protéger. Malheureusement, les controverses sur l'impact de l'aide durant le conflit ont été oubliées. Aujourd'hui, la légende humanitaire du Biafra célèbre le sauvetage d'enfants affamés et la naissance de la célèbre ONG *Médecins sans*

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Frontières, mais elle ne reconnaît pas l'impact militaire des opérations de secours qui ont permis aux sécessionnistes de continuer la guerre pendant plus d'un an après qu'elle a été perdue sur le plan militaire. Alors qu'il prolongeait les souffrances des populations locales, le secours fut un sujet de discussion pendant et juste après la guerre. Depuis lors, ce débat stratégique a été « perdu à la traduction ». Cet article soutient que la notion contemporaine de l'aide humanitaire, qui défend un droit d'intervention pour sauver des innocents, complique les choses pour au moins deux raisons. Tout d'abord, il nous amène à penser à tort que le Biafra a donné naissance à la notion d'une responsabilité internationale de protéger, quelque chose qui avait existé auparavant. Deuxièmement, il éclipse le côté sombre de l'aide humanitaire, où l'intervention internationale assiste souvent les belligérants plutôt que les civils, prolonge la souffrance et pose de nouvelles menaces à la souveraineté nationale.

Introduction

In African contemporary history, Biafra is not only remembered as one of the worst humanitarian crises on the continent, but also as a tragedy that gave rise to the concept of *ingérence*, or the international responsibility to protect. Unfortunately, the controversies about the impact of aid during the conflict have been forgotten. Today, the humanitarian legend of the Biafran crisis focuses on the role of people like Bernard Kouchner, currently the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the birth of the famous NGO *Médecins sans Frontières*, which was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1999.

This stereotype does not acknowledge, however, the military impact of relief operations that helped the secessionists to resist and carry on the fighting. Port Harcourt fell into Nigerian hands one year after an independent Republic of Biafra was proclaimed by Lt General Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 1967. From then on, the secessionists were completely surrounded and had no further access to the sea. From a military point of view, they were finished. In Port Harcourt, they had lost the war rather than simply losing a battle. Yet their fighting continued until January 1970 thanks to the support of humanitarian organizations that provided vital supplies to the Biafran Army. As it prolonged the suffering of local populations, relief was a matter of discussion during and just after the war. Since then, this strategic debate has been 'lost in translation'. Nowadays, the heroic resistance of the Biafrans is analyzed as a result of the disorganization of the Nigerian Army, the successful tactics of the secessionists and/or the determination of a people struggling for survival. The part played by humanitarian aid is reduced to the attempts to break the blockade and to advocate a right of intervention in order to save starving children. Such a vision confuses the issue for at least two reasons. First, it lets us think wrongly that Biafra gave birth to the concept of an

international responsibility to protect. Secondly, it overshadows the dark side of humanitarian aid.

The Responsibility to Protect and State Sovereignty: An Old Issue

Historically, the international concept of a responsibility to protect was not born out of the Biafran crisis. It existed before, elsewhere and in other ways, for instance, when the French Army invaded Lebanon to protect Christian communities against their Druze oppressor in 1860. Backed by European powers, such an *intervention d'humanité* was already linked to gunboat diplomacy, as humanitarian interventions of today often have a military component, from Afghanistan to D.R. Congo. Colonial motives were of course different from operations that now aim to impose peace on behalf of the international community. But humanitarian rhetoric was always an argument of foreign policy. Indeed, Africa was colonized under the pretext of civilizing the continent and abolishing the slave trade (Verges 2001).

In this regard, the Biafran crisis was only a step towards the formalization and modernization of the concept of the responsibility to protect. At the end of the 1960s, the Cold War and the superpower rivalry did not allow the United Nations to circumvent state sovereignties and to organize peace enforcement operations without the consent of all. So humanitarian actors had to rely on themselves and the media to break up the Nigerian blockade against the secessionists. This kind of advocacy was not completely new. The Boer War in 1901 had already been a major case for humanitarian relief (Thompson 2002). According to Andrew Thompson, the amount of money collected for the British in South Africa was even higher than the funds raised by the *Live Aid* show during the famine in Ethiopia in 1985.[1] Yet that was for white victims only. The Ethiopians invaded by the Italian Fascists in 1936 or the Congolese at independence in 1960 got almost nothing. The real innovation of the Biafran crisis was worldwide humanitarian mobilization for Black Africans.

The mass starvation of Biafrans in 1968 thus played a crucial role. For the first time, photographs of emaciated children started to circulate widely. Humanitarian actors also became more vocal and campaigned against the deadly Nigerian blockade. A young doctor of the Red Cross, Bernard Kouchner, refused to keep silent and stay neutral. He violated the internal rules of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), which had the greatest difficulties in being allowed to operate within the Biafran enclave. Horrified by what he had seen, Kouchner went back to France, raised the issue to the media and denounced what he called a genocide. The Biafrans, he said, were starving, the international community was doing nothing about it and the Nigerians forbade NGOs to deliver food to the secessionists. He believed

that the use of hunger as a weapon of war was indeed genocide, even if the Igbo were not to be massacred after their defeat in 1970. For Kouchner and many others, the Nigerian blockade represented a Muslim plot to finish the pogroms of 1966 and eliminate a Christian people. The story was relayed by the French secret service, which used the genocide propaganda to raise support for the Biafrans in order to break up an Anglophone giant within Francophone Africa (Glaser and Smith 2005:67). Such politicization of a humanitarian crisis is a classic situation, and is reminiscent of the current American rhetoric of genocide in Darfur to mobilize the international community against the Sudanese Islamic military junta.

Humanitarianism and the Biafran Economy of War

From a media point of view, Biafra was a success story, the first major famine to be addressed through media images of starving Africans, before Ethiopia in 1984 or Somalia in 1992. But from a humanitarian point of view, it was an operational disaster, a logistical nightmare and a political failure. Professionals know that a fundamental dilemma of relief organizations is that they help combatants while trying to assist war victims. Aid exacerbates conflicts because it feeds militants, sustains their dependants, supports war economies and provides legitimacy to belligerents (Lischer 2005:6). And all of this happened in Biafra. Aid legitimized the struggle for independence of Christian Igbo who were portrayed as victims of a genocide. It also helped the rebels to be supplied with food and weapons. This was because humanitarian logistics in war zones usually follow the same routes and means of transport as the military (Nordstrom 2004). Planes that supplied Biafra from São Tomé carried both food and weapons. Other humanitarian hubs like Peshawar for Afghanistan after 1980 or Lokichokio for southern Sudan after 1989 are also known to have provided 'freedom fighters' with fresh supplies. Biafra was no exception to such a problem. The strategic contribution of relief to the Biafran war economy was twofold: logistical and financial.

To start with, planes were a vital link to the outside world after the last Biafran access to the sea, Port Harcourt, fell in May 1968. Humanitarian organizations, especially the Catholic Caritas and the Scandinavian Protestant Churches, were instrumental in setting up an air bridge from São Tomé. Unlike the ICRC, they worked only on the Biafran side, so they did not have to bother with the Nigerian Government. The Norwegian Church Relief, for instance, decided to circumvent the Federal authorities because Lagos did not allow it to supply the enclave and had diverted one of its food cargoes to Santa Isabel, now the capital city of Equatorial Guinea.[2] After a secret visit to Lisbon, the organization's general secretary, Elias Berge, began to send provisions from the Portuguese island of São Tomé in the planes of an

American adventurer, Hank Wharton, who carried weapons for the Biafrans. By loading food onto these planes whenever there was space available, the Norwegian Church Relief opened itself to the charge of being involved in arms-smuggling. But it justified the violation of the Nigerian airspace because the blockade was an illegitimate weapon of war and could therefore be broken.

With its Danish, Swedish and Finnish counterparts, the Norwegian Church Relief eventually participated in August 1968 in the creation of Nordchurchaid, an ad hoc organization in collaboration with a company based in Reykjavik, *Flughjalp* ('Aid by Air'), to send food to São Tomé. From here, relief was then transported to Biafra by a consortium of some thirty European and American NGOs, the Joint Church Aid (JCA), which was nicknamed 'Jesus Christ Airlines'. Their clandestine planes flew by night in very difficult conditions, and three of them were destroyed by Nigerian bombs. The Norwegian Church Relief funded two million out of a total of seven million dollars spent during these operations, which were joined in June 1969 by secular organizations like Oxfam, Save the Children and the ICRC. Interestingly enough, the 'Jesus Christ Airlines' was headed up from August until September 1968 by Carl-Gustaf Von Rosen, a Swedish count who was to rebuild the Biafran Air Force in May 1969. Internal rules of Nordchurchaid did not mention the prohibition of weapons, and the cargo included spare parts for trucks that were supposed to deliver food within the enclave, but could also transport troops (Lloyd 1972). The military support was obvious. To continue receiving weapons and planes, the Biafrans had only one airstrip, at Uli, and the JCA agreed to enlarge it to keep it operational, unlike the ICRC, which refused to do so (Wiseberg 1974). At the end of 1969, the situation was so dire that Odumegwu Ojukwu officially asked the relief agencies to supply his army. During distributions, it became more and more difficult to protect civilians from soldiers who tried to take food by force; aid workers had to hire armed guards to protect their stores from looting (Cronje 1972).

The relief support to the enclave war economy was not only material, but also financial. The secessionists lacked hard currencies because the introduction of new banknotes by the Federal government in January 1968 rendered valueless the millions of old Nigerian pounds still in Biafran hands. The creation of a Biafran pound was not a solution. It had no value outside of the enclave. Printed in Portugal, it was a paper money only, for it would have been too costly to mint and import coins. As a result, even Biafran banknotes were scarce, while plastic tokens were used as ersatz coins. Within the enclave, the population preferred to keep its cash at home because their accounts had been frozen by the local authorities and they risked being recruited by the military while going to the bank (Uche 2002). They tried to save Nigerian coins which, unlike banknotes, were still used on the Federal

side and whose highest value was one shilling. With these coins, some smugglers succeeded in crossing the frontlines and importing goods on the black market.[3] But the government of Odumegwu Ojukwu could not export anything to gain hard currency. Because of the Federal blockade, oil revenues did not materialize and no foreign private interests were willing to risk purchasing rights to exploit Biafran mineral resources. In order to be allowed to go inside the enclave, humanitarian organizations were the only ones to buy the local currency, and they provided for free the necessary supplies that fed the military.

Aid thus became crucial to prevent the collapse of the secession attempt. The Commander of the Biafran Army, Alexander Madiebo, admitted that they eventually lost the war because of a lack of money (Madiebo 1980). As a matter of fact, relief and mission organizations were the primary source of foreign exchange (£4.3 million), followed by the French secret service (£2 million) and donations from the Igbo diaspora overseas (£750,000), the Igbo in Nigeria (£100,000) and various concerned citizens in the West (£100,000) (Lindsay 1969). According to Odumegwu Ojukwu, 'the only source of income available to Biafra was the hard currency spent by the churches for yams and garri'. His Chief of Military Planning, Mike Okwechime, confirmed that 'financing the war was largely accomplished through private and humanitarian contributions. Much was diverted from funds raised abroad. Those who wished to make strictly humanitarian contributions could give to specific agencies but those giving to Biafra often didn't ask any questions, and the money could be used to purchase arms on the black market' (Stremlau 1977). Out of $250 million of humanitarian aid to Biafra, it was estimated that 15 per cent was directly spent on military items. This was equivalent to the amount of hard currency spent on weapons by the Nigerian Federal Government during the whole of the war (Smilie 1985).

Lessons not Learned

Given its dubious deployment, the role of humanitarian aid became a matter of controversy. During the conflict, two points of views clashed (Okpoko 1986). On one side, the British government argued that the most efficient way to save lives was to shorten the war by letting the Nigerians win: incidentally, this was also the position of Winston Churchill when he forbade humanitarian aid to occupied Europe during the Second World War. On the other side, charities alleged that to stop their airlift would result in millions of deaths. But their position became irrelevant after the defeat of the Biafrans in January 1970, for there was no effort to carry through a genocide against the Igbos. It then appeared clear that the main funders of the JCA consortium, namely the Catholic Caritas and the Protestant WCC (World Council of

Churches), were far from being neutral and had deliberately supported the rebels. Worse, they had prolonged the suffering of the population. Critics suggested that the initials WCC stood for 'War Can Continue'. Yet the humanitarian workers denied their strategic involvement and continued to claim they were apolitical.[4] Most of them refused to admit any responsibility in the conflict. At best, an official of the WCC raised doubts about JCA 'because of its political effects … which include exposing the churches to charges of prolonging the war and adding to the suffering of the people'.[5] As we can see, humanitarian actors were more concerned about their reputation than about the military use of their aid.

Such an attitude is not peculiar to the Biafran crisis. In general, relief organizations are reluctant to accept their wrongs and the political implications of their work. 'Aspiring to good,' writes a specialist, 'humanitarians too often mute awareness that their best ideas can have bad consequences' (Kennedy 2004). Regarding Biafra, relief workers considered they had done their best. Some even minimized their strategic role. According to Dan Jacobs, the secessionists did not need any humanitarian cover for their arms imports. Planes loaded with weapons still landed at Uli when the ICRC and the churches suspended their air bridge for a while (Jacobs 1987). Of course, it is true that the secessionists would have tried to continue their struggle anyway, with or without humanitarian aid. They had not needed any foreign support to start fighting in 1967. From 1968 onwards, relief only strengthened their capacity to resist and helped them to carry on the struggle for independence. The basic argument was not that humanitarian aid alone could prolong conflicts. The real issue was to know whether relief did more harm than good.

The problem was not restricted to Biafra, and was found again in Ethiopia in the 1980s or Somalia and Southern Sudan in the 1990s (Pérouse de Montclos 2001). Since the end of the Cold War, it is even possible that the unwelcome side-effects of humanitarian aid became worse because belligerents could not rely any more on military support from the superpowers (DeMars 2002:206). In Liberia and Sierra Leone, combatants starved their own population to attract relief and divert it (Hoffman 2004). In Rwandese refugee camps in 1994, NGOs fed the criminals who had just committed genocide. In the rest of D.R. Congo, relief was not only diverted by the belligerents, it also sustained and exacerbated local corruption (Reed, Weiss and Mubagwa 2004:38). Actually, the problem became so acute that authors like Alex de Waal considered that 'most humanitarian aid in Africa is useless or damaging and should be abandoned' (de Waal 1997). Others thought that, at the very least, governmental and non-governmental organizations should be ready to suspend their relief operations when their assets are looted, aid is diverted by the combatants, humanitarian workers are kidnapped and they

realize they are doing more harm than good. Stephen Stedman and Fred Tanner, for instance, recommended the development of standards that would allow refugee agencies 'to refuse to engage in situations that blatantly support warring groups'. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, they wrote,

> should have in its arsenal the option of refusal […] and create a category of forced evacuation or hostage-taking that will signal to the Security Council and attentive public around the world that manipulation is occurring as it unfolds.

Crises could be divided into categories that would determine how to respond, continue Stedman and Tanner:

> If a refugee flight was considered a forced evacuation or hostage-taking, then UNHCR's obligations would be diminished, and the organization would have a powerful tool for publicizing the manipulation (Stedman and Tanner 2003:185, 187).

In such a situation, the difficulty is to explain to the general public that humanitarian aid can do more harm than good and that it is sometimes better to stop it. Excessive media coverage and the politicization of relief do not help in this regard, for states and NGOs risk being accused of doing nothing. Because the humanitarian market is very competitive, aid is often implemented for the audience rather than for the victims. As long as the show can go on, private and governmental funders do not care much about its negative impact. David Sogge explains:

> Alleviating poverty and relieving victims of crisis, empowering community groupings and women, and casting spotlights on chronic wrongs and conflicts: these are among the main purposes private aid agencies set for themselves. Many assume they are making good these claims. Funds have been kept flowing on that promise. No agency seems to quit the field, and more agencies professing such purposes enter it every year. Yet this may reflect not the strength of performance, but one of greatest weakness: funding is only poorly linked with actual outcomes – if it is linked at all. Agencies are rewarded chiefly for spending and being active; they are almost never punished when that spending and those activities come to nothing, or entail unwelcome side-effects (Sogge 1996:16).

Theoretically, NGOs are supposed to stop their programmes when they cannot prove a causal link between their work and an improvement of the situation (Spar and Dail 2002:4). The reality is quite different. In most cases, NGOs quit the field for other reasons. According to a poll of 2,000-plus individuals, one humanitarian worker out of five mentions being evacuated because of insecurity (Buchanan and Muggah 2005). Lack of funding is another factor. But in general, NGOs are quite reluctant to leave. Their 'relief culture' explains this attitude. Historically, some of the most famous

humanitarian NGOs have precisely been founded to protest against military blockades: Save the Children in Germany in 1919, Oxfam in Greece in 1942 or Médecins sans Frontières after Biafra in 1971. Today, they often protest when governmental organizations threaten to stop aid because of a lack of feasibility or political motives, as with the British DfID (Department for International Development) in Sierra Leone (Marriage 2006:19). For humanitarian workers, it is unethical to trade the saving of lives now for the potential saving of lives in the future. Faced with a Catch-22 situation, some argue that diverted aid is not likely to result in measurable development, yet the recipient country would fail without continued donor support.

The hypothesis of such a school of thought is that foreign relief is indispensable for the survival of the victims. Recipients would be incapable of coping with their fate if not supported. Yet the problem remains that we don't really know if Africans would be better with or without emergency aid. Relief organizations tend to ignore or even erode local capacities (Juma 2002). Regarding Biafra, we simply don't know what the situation would have been without the rescue operations. It is very possible that a longer interruption of the humanitarian air bridge could have helped the Nigerian Army to crush the rebellion sooner … and save hundreds of thousands of lives instead of prolonging the conflict. This is exactly what the United States and the United Kingdom did during the Second World War: Winston Churchill was convinced that only a military victory could relieve suffering. He promised 'sweat and blood' and forbade aid to occupied Europe.

Relief and Social Responsibility

Because we cannot rewrite history, we have to admit our ignorance about the 'best' humanitarian solution for Biafra. The fundamental problem of relief organizations is that they do not even admit their political responsibility in conflicts. As a result, they hardly acknowledge the possibility of stopping their operations when they do more harm than good. In its *Manual for Practioners*, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) devotes only three lines to the problem: 'if non-compliance with the agreements results in an operating environment which compromises humanitarian security, consider, as a last resort, suspension of humanitarian activities until a conductive … operating environment is re-established' (McHugh and Bessler 2006:82).

The Charter of the Sphere Project, an NGO initiative to create minimum humanitarian standards, is as elusive. It acknowledges 'that the attempt to provide assistance in situations of conflict may potentially render civilians more vulnerable to attack, or may on occasion bring unintended advantage to one or more of the warring parties'. But it does not say how to minimise

such adverse effects and it does not set any benchmark to stop sending relief. If we are to believe the fine wishes of this Charter, 'it is the obligation of warring parties to respect the humanitarian nature of such interventions' (Sphere Project 2000). How to compel combatants to do so remains a mystery.

All sorts of phony arguments have been raised to condemn the possibility of stopping rescue operations when they do more harm than good. In Rwandan refugees camps in Zaire in 1994, for instance, some rationalized that if the Hutu fighters did not receive aid, they would steal it from the civilians. In other words, it was better to feed war criminals even if that helped them to resume the genocide! The same line of argument was used for military dictatorships like that of Siyad Barre in Somalia. Some authors claimed that the reduction of aid at the end of the Cold War was a major factor in the eruption of civil strife in the Horn of Africa (Laitin 1999). According to David Laitin, it precipitated the fall of Siyad Barre because the regime had no more resources to share in order to maintain its social base.

But such an analysis overshadows the other factors behind the civil war in Somalia, such as clan divisions, drought and arms proliferation. Moreover, the time frame did not confirm its conclusion: the opposition did not wait for a reduction in aid flows before opting for armed struggle. On the contrary, the troops of Siyad Barre bombed Hargeisa in 1988, when foreign assistance was still very significant. At this time, humanitarian aid for the Somali refugees of the Ogaden war of 1977 provided a major funding resource for the regime; the UNHCR alone injected the equivalent of 40 per cent of the state budget. Foreign assistance thus strengthened the dictatorship and delayed its fall. After the departure of Siyad Barre in 1991, other authors then argued that the diversion of aid by combatants supplied local markets, reduced food prices and defused confrontation for scarce resources (Auvinen and Kivimäki 2000:219). Still, humanitarian aid also brought new motives of competition and provoked conflicts for its control (de Waal 1994).

All in all, the fundamental issue is to assess the effects of relief in a war economy. On one side, humanitarian organizations claim to have a major impact on relieving suffering. On the other, they deny or minimize their political role in sustaining conflicts. The contradiction is obvious. Regarding southern Sudan, for instance, Oystein Rolandsen argued that the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) diverted little food after distribution, so it would have been useless to threaten to stop aid in order to encourage the guerrillas to protect civilians and to respect international humanitarian law (Rolandsen 2005:132). But the very same author drew attention to the strategic importance of relief when the movement of John Garang lost its rear bases in Ethiopia in 1991 and had to rely on foreign assistance to feed its combatants within southern Sudan.

Eventually, our ignorance of the real impact of relief should advocate a principle of caution. Like transnational corporations, non-governmental and governmental relief organizations need to exercise social responsibility in war economies. They sometimes bribe corrupt leaders to gain access to victims (Ewins 2006:87). And they directly assist combatants when they provide means of transport and infrastructure such as airstrips. Roads built by the British Save the Children Fund in Ethiopia in the 1980s, or by the French ACTED (Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement) in Afghanistan in the 1990s, are known to have been used by the military to reach remote areas and extend the fighting. From Burma to Angola, Nigeria or Sudan, humanitarian organizations criticize oil companies because they support dictatorships by paying taxes and allowing soldiers to use their planes or their cars. Yet relief actors are faced with the same challenge. As they follow the routes already used by troops and arms smugglers, they raise a similar issue to the corporate problem of tax evasion and money laundering, which point to the same offshore banking centres. In both cases, the same logistical or financial channels have criminal and legal purposes.

Of course, foreign direct investment and humanitarian inputs do not carry the same weight. Following the story of David and Goliath, public opinion usually favours 'small' NGOs as against 'big' governments or 'giant' transnational corporations. Some authors thus argue that private voluntary organizations do not have to be accountable because they are 'poor' and do not bear the same responsibility as, say, Shell or the World Bank (Bendell and Cox 2006:114). In other words, NGOs can criticize the lack of accountability of transnational corporations and international financial institutions; yet they do not need to be responsible to the communities they claim to help, empower and represent. Such double standards are difficult to accept (Pérouse de Montclos 2007). To have a charitable and non-profit motive does not exempt humanitarian workers from their social responsibility. In war-torn countries, the problem is even worse because it can contradict the aim of saving lives, not to mention its potentially negative effects on state capacity and sovereignty, which are even more essential to long-term security for local populations.

Notes

1. Organized by Bob Geldof, the lead singer of the Boomtown Rats, the Live Aid concert gathered famous rock stars like Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger , Bob Dylan, Elton John, Phil Collins and Crosby, Still, Nash & Young. Thanks to the media, it raised a hundred million Euros in July 1985: a worldwide record before the Asiatic tsunami of December 2004.

2. More details and references on foreign NGOs involved during the Biafran crisis, from Oxfam to Norwegian Church Aid, are to be found in the database of AidWatch: http://www.observatoire-humanitaire.org/.
3. Interestingly enough, such war profiteers did not suffer much when the secessionists were defeated in 1970. Their wealth was accumulated in merchandise and was not seized when a federal decree compelled the Biafrans to exchange all their cash for a lump sum payment of twenty Nigerian pounds per person. Cf. A. Harneit-Sievers, Axel and S. Emezue,(2000) 'Towards a Social History of Warfare and Reconstruction: The Nigerian/Biafran Case', in I. Amadiume and A. An-Na'im, eds., The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing and Social Justice, London: Zed Books, pp. 110–26.
4. This position was always contested by Lagos. As for the secessionists, they also suspected some relief agencies of being Federal spies because many Biafrans towns fell into Nigerian hands subsequent to the arrival of humanitarian organizations in the area.
5. Off the record, the debate was of course different. Mike Yarrow (1978), an American Quaker, reports that at a meeting in Rome on 8 November 1968, JCA officials realized that providing food to the Biafrans could prolong the war and involve more suffering.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 83–101

(ISSN 0850-3907)

The Constraints of Rural Women in Informal Economic Activities in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the constraints on rural women in the informal sector of Imo State, Nigeria. Lack of access roads, irregular means of transportation, inadequate credit facilities, inaccessibility to socio-economic facilities and land tenure are identified as among the factors that have adverse effects on the participation/activities of rural women engaged in informal economic activities in the rural areas of Imo State. The paper further reveals that a majority of rural women in Imo State, engaged in informal economic activities, do not have significant access to institutional finance, neither do they for socio-economic services that could enhance women's informal economic activities. The paper eventually makes policy recommendations to help alleviate women's difficulties in the informal sector.

Résumé

Cet article analyse les contraintes des femmes rurales dans le secteur informel de l'État d'Imo au Nigeria. Le manque de routes d'accès, l'irrégularité des moyens de transport, l'insuffisance des structures de crédit, l'inaccessibilité des structures socio-économiques et le régime foncier ont été identifiés comme étant parmi les facteurs qui ont des effets néfastes sur la participation/les activités des femmes rurales engagées dans des activités économiques au niveau des zones rurales de l'État d'Imo. L'article révéle aussi que la majorité des femmes rurales dans l'État d'Imo engagées dans des activités économiques informelles n'ont pas un accès considérable à des financements institutionnels ni à des services socio-économiques qui pourraient améliorer leurs activités économiques informelles. Cet article donne aussi des recommandations politiques quant aux moyens d'alléger les difficultés rencontrées par les femmes dans le secteur informel.

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Introduction

Decades of stifling structural adjustment programmes coupled with austerities of neoliberal economic reforms have led to a worsening of economic problems in recent times. And the globalization of culture, capital, and information has had a significant influence on the informal sector. For one thing, women in rural areas, who would ordinarily be housewives alone in their own right and locality, are increasingly forced by economic downturns to participate in informal economic activities in search of income to support their families or even to become breadwinners. In certain cases, a rural woman in the village might herself be compelled to rely on the labour of unpaid family members, especially that of children. While men migrate out of the rural areas for urban centres to seek better livelihoods to maintain their families, migrant fathers have to leave their children behind under the care of their wives.

Mate's (2005) study affirms that in the face of male migration, women are left to take care of houses, cattle and children in town or rural homesteads, Her study also affirms that when a husband's money falls short, very often the wife is forced to get an informal sector job. This perhaps explains why as a consequence of enduring sharp economic downturns mothers and wives enter the workforce to make ends meet and support families following their husbands who as sole breadwinners, had migrated, suffered wage cuts, or been fired.

Presently, there is an upsurge of female-headed households in the Nigerian hinterlands or the rural areas of most regions, occasioned by globalization. This is to say that, theoretically, women's activities in the informal sector enable them to effectively combine their productive and reproductive roles because hours of work are flexible, permitting women to care for their children. It is notable, however, that while there is a high status of men and their economies of masculinity, women's collective subordination as a social class under masculine structures of domination points to the confinement of the role of women to that of primary caregivers and parents with daily responsibility for children in the society. Even the very fact of having to depend on men at times to seek autonomy reinforces the subordination that denies women their status as social and economic actors in their own right and in their own terms.

It must be emphasized that the informal sector, which today is being gradually dominated by women, derives from globalized capitalist structures of and assumptions about gender and power that have tended to prescribe and legitimate the public sphere for men, while confining women's activities and capabilities to the private sphere and the less visible zones of the public

workplace. This implies that while men are free to seek employment and harness possibilities outside of the home, women are generally constrained by domestic chores and minor informal sector activities from which they can only graduate fully or temporarily by compounding the subjection of fellow women or even children who act as unpaid labour in family businesses. These facts suggests that globalization is a highly hierarchical and inegalitarian process affecting individuals and communities differently as informed by gender and geography (Nyamnjoh 2005a).

In an environment of neoliberal economic reforms in Nigeria increasing poverty has rendered female participation in rural informal economic activities an emerging livelihood strategy. Thus women's increasing participation in the informal sector arises from the current economic hardship in Nigeria and the fallout of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). More than before, women are under increasing pressure to contribute to household income; this is even more true of women whose husbands have been laid off by the formal sector as a result of rationalization, privatization of public enterprises, and cuts in government spending (Soetan 1993).

Females in Nigeria's informal sector seem to be invisible, along with their contributions and needs, given that the prevailing soical system has a, patriarchal context in which women seek and access social opportunities (Nyamnjoh 2005b). Gender inequalities are persistent, a situation corroborated by Arnfred (2004), who states that 'women are denied the recognition and representation they seek for their complex identities and sexualities'. Women thus, although disadvantaged by gender, the access to needed resources and production inputs of rural men, are used to further institutionalize social inequalities and silences over the rights of rural women in the informal sector. As long as states, laws and cultures continue to be paternalistic, nurturing and glorifying men and boys at the expense of women and girls, they must realize that women will always feel relegated to the background, especially when even while grappling with the realities that informal sector activities usually have low returns, some people view women who work in the informal sector as loose. Mate's (2005) study revealed that informal sector activities are sometimes perceived or seen as an embarrassing attempt at resolving poverty. She explained that in Zimbabwe, for men especially, when wives participate in informal sector activities it is considered an indictment of one's masculinity. It suggests that the man is incapable of looking after his family. It is obvious that these latter dimensions are far from being complimentary for womenfolk in Zimbabwe, Nigeria or elsewhere.

Rural women's informal economic activities are an integral component of the rural economies in Nigeria, including Imo State. Imo State embodies

both agricultural and non-agricultural activities by rural women in the rural areas. Non-agricultural activities include traditional crafts, modern crafts, small-scale distribution, and tertiary activities such as hairdressing, photography, and transport operations. These are predominantly small-scale production and service activities. Imo State is largely made up of rural villages, which constitute most of its population, and the rural women of the state have resorted to various sources of livelihood such as farming, fishing, and trading. Women's informal economic activities constitute the single most important source of employment in rural Nigeria. Abumere (1995) described them as invisible, irregular, backyard, underground, unorganized, black, murky, subterranean, hidden, shadow, clandestine, illegal, unobserved, unreported, unrecorded, second, residual, and unenumerated. However, they employ between 40 and 60 percent of the labour force and contribute between a quarter and a third of incomes in most African countries (International Labour Organization 1985). As a result of the diminished economic status of women, they are seldom able to explore and exploit emerging opportunities for higher incomes. This makes their access to formal sector funds minimal (Federal Government of Nigeria 1993; Damson and Oyeyinka 1993).

The agricultural labour force makes up almost two-thirds of the economically active population in Imo State, and rural women working informally are a significant part of the total. Additionally, the effect of neoliberalism is increased informal sector activities. The notion of the informal economic sector for this study captures certain peculiarities, such as informality of business organization, use of rudimentary technology, lack of separation of consumption and production, ease of entry and exit, reliance on family labour and apprentices, and small requirements for capital. UNECA/AAPAM (1992) defined the informal sector as those small-scale income-generating activities that are not registered under law, do not comply with legislated standards of quality, minimum pay and safety, and, more often than not, do not pay taxes. The informal sector is synonymous with informal economic activities, the real sector, the economy of the poor, petty commodity producers and micro enterprises (Gerry 1978; Hemmer and Manuel, 1989; McNeil 1993; Obadan et al. 1996). The importance of this economic sector to the rural women in Imo State cannot be over-emphasized.

The problems confronting rural women in informal economic activities relative to rural development are manifold. For instance, Ijere (1992) found that commercial banks and government agencies are unsympathetic to women seeking funds to set up income-yielding ventures, and the women themselves lack initiative because they are reluctant to exert themselves, tending to abdicate their responsibilities and rights to men, especially in male-headed households.

In general, informal economic activities in the rural parts of developing countries such as Nigeria may be said to encounter problems that range from communication to socio-economic facilities, which are associated with low production and returns. For example, Ogundana (1970), Aluko (1980) and Ogbonna (1988) recognized the severe mobility deficiencies found in rural areas and stressed that where there are no means of transportation, the will to produce more for sale will be stifled, and even when more is produced it is bought by itinerant traders at prices much lower than can be charged in the towns.

In addition, it is observed that lack of working capital and finance to expand investment is the most general constraint affecting informal sector activities in Nigeria – 76.4 per cent of entrepreneurs considered it their major problem (FGN 1993). Various studies have revealed that over half of the finance for initial investments and expanding capital comes from personal savings (FGN 1993; Damson and Oyeyinka 1993), and also from contributions and borrowing from friends and relatives (Odurukwe and Okorji 2002). Minimum access to formal sector funds is consistently mentioned as a related major problem.

Other studies by Saitao and Spurning (1992), and Eze and Okoli's (1995) study in Nsukka as well as Eze's (2002) study in Anaocha LGA of Anambra State have blamed poor food producing and processing activities on limited dissemination of agricultural technologies. In Eboh and Ocheoha (2002), evidence from Enugu State showed that rural people expressed concern about the severe debilitating constraints on their non-farm enterprises. These included shortage of initial and operation capital (89 per cent), lack of access to requisite credit (85 per cent), high cost of enterprise establishment/operating (72 per cent), poor and sometimes non-existent infrastructure (81 per cent), scarcity of inputs or raw materials (60 per cent) and lack of information, knowledge and access concerning productivity-enhancing technologies (58 per cent).

Again, there are problems such as poor marketing systems and competition from protected formal sector firms. These have constituted the major demand problems in informal sector activities in Nigeria. Increased competition and reduced demand are seen as central problems of the informal sector while lack of market space is a particularly acute problem for transporters and retail wood workers (Damson and Oyeyinka 1993). Obadan et al. (1996) also noted that problems arising from government regulations included heavy taxes, harassment from local authorities, imposition of certain standards on the production of goods and services, and unclear laws and regulations.

Provision of infrastructural facilities is another problem, making the rural environment unattractive to the young, and leading to migration. Anozie and

Onwumere (1988) and Igbozurike (1985) found that rural electrification and water supply are critical variables in rural development. Specifically, there is the problem of land tenure. Land ownership is the primary determinant of degree of wealth, level of social welfare, access to power, and, in many instances, even survival (Igbozurike 1986; Barlowe 1978; Crowley 1995). Yet, according to Nwebo and Eze (1989), the rural poor – peasant farmers, farm workers, fishermen, rural women – are all deprived of rights, including access to land, which we consider basic to their material existence and self-realization.

Considering all such constraints, Olayide et al. (1975) offer a fivefold classification of the difficulties: natural problems, socio-cultural problems, politico-administrative problems, organizational problems, and economic problems. They also point out that rural-based enterprises are marked by smallness of scale and primitive, cultural and poor management practices. On the other hand, the argument of FAO (1999) is that providing women with secure and effective access to land and other variables can benefit families, communities and countries through increased economic opportunities; increased investment in land and food production; improved family security during economic and social transitions; and better land stewardship. It is worth mentioning here that some gender-based studies, including those by Dietrich (1995), Malunga (1998), Feldman (1991), Brand et al. (1995) and Goodale (1989), have contested the challenges to women's involvement in the informal sector. According to Dietrich (1995), the fact that women are in the forefront of this struggle indeed means that the focus is on the right to life and livelihood.

It is the aim of this study to examine the problems and prospects of informal economic activities in the development process of rural areas by rural women in Imo State. It has the following objectives: (1) to identify the types of informal economic activities engaged in by rural woman; (2) to identify the constraints faced by rural women in their informal economic activities; and (3) to make recommendations geared towards the improvement of rural women's work in the informal sector. Through such research, we obtain better insights into the dynamics of persistent gender inequalities and the challenges of the rural informal sector in Nigeria. The study will aid policy formulation for informal sector activities and poverty alleviation of women in rural areas, which will in turn contribute to the improvement of the welfare of the rural population and assist government in channelling its activity in the rural areas, leading to the mobilization of women for the economic reactivation of Imo State.

Materials and Methods

Sampling Procedure

For the purpose of this study, the first sampling procedure was to obtain a list of Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Imo State and their political division. There are 27 LGAs in Imo State, politically divided into the three senatorial district (SD) or geopolitical zones of Orlu, Owerri and Okigwe. Each senatorial district was taken as a stratum in the stratified sampling frame. The rationale for using the SDs as strata was to ensure equitable coverage so that the peculiarities of each zone are captured in our survey.

In each stratum, the LGAs were arranged alphabetically and systematically selected at intervals of three, giving a sample of nine LGAs for the purpose of administering the questionnaire. The number of LGA sampled from each stratum was in proportion to the number of local governments in the SD. Thus, from Orlu Zone, with 12 LGAs, Owerri with nine and Okigwe with six, the numbers of sampled local governments were four, three and two respectively.

Within each sampled LGA, two communities were randomly selected using the table of random numbers. In all, 18 autonomous communities were covered by the survey. It is to be noted that each local government area and each community serve as a stratum so that the emergent technique is best described as a randomized systematic stratified sampling technique. The rationale for stratified sampling was to utilize the expertise of Schaffer, Mendenhall and Ott (1979) who articulate that 'stratified sampling often results in increased information for a given cost'. They contend that the data are more homogeneous within each stratum than in the population as a whole, plus the added advantage that separate estimates of population parameters can be obtained for each stratum without additional sampling. For a study within a defined geographical milieu, the randomized systematic stratified sampling is viewed as relevant and appropriate.

Source of Data and Analytical Techniques

Data for this study were derived from mainly primary sources. These were obtained by using a well-structured 48-item questionnaire, which was augmented with focus group discussion sessions. The respondents for the research were the rural women who engaged in informal sector activities.

Therefore, the information provided by these women formed the majority of the primary data including direct field observation. It is noteworthy that the data equally provided useful information on the socio-economic status of the rural women, various types of informal economic activities by the women and the contribution of rural women to informal economic activities in the study area.

Other sources of data included secondary data collected from journals, research reports and statistical records from the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, the Bureau for Chieftaincy and Local Government Affairs, Departments of Finance in the sampled Local Government Council and National Population Commission. Information obtained was related to rural women and informal economic activities, especially the prevalent ones in the study state.

The primary data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to plot tables from which Z-tests of proportion tests were employed to draw inferences about population parameters from appropriate sample estimates on specific constraints facing those rural women.

Results and Discussion

The various types of informal economic activities engaged in by the rural women in this study are shown in Table 1 below.

Types of Informal Economic Activities of Rural Women

Table 1 reveals that the rural women are engaged several informal economic activities. For this study only the predominant activity of the respondent was considered. The study revealed that a large proportion of respondents (39.7 per cent) were involved in petty trading. Farming, i.e. crop and animal husbandry, occupied 29.1 per cent of the respondents. Artisan/handicraft activities were not popular among rural women, and they accounted for 3.8 per cent. This could be related to scarce material inputs and lack of specialized skills required for artisan and handicraft activities. Rural women lacked such resources.

Problems identified as militating against rural women informal economic activities in this study are shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Types of Informal Economic Activities of Rural Women

Types of Informal Economic Activities	Frequency	Percentage Frequency
Farming	680	29.1
Food Processing	640	27.4
Artisan/Handicrafts	90	3.8
Petty Trading	930	39.7
TOTAL	2340	100.0

Source: Author's fieldwork.

Constraints on Informal Economic Activities

Table 2 reveals that many problems confront informal economic activities in the study area. Generally the problems range from poor development of

infrastructural facilities (roads, electricity, potable water et.c), and lack of credit facilities to small markets and land tenure problems that hinder development of large-scale farming. Out of 2,340 respondents 310, or 13.2 per cent, identified poor access roads as a constraint militating against their optimal performance; 4.3 per cent identified irregular means of transportation as a problem. Inadequate credit facilities were identified by 23.1 per cent, absence of socio-economic facilities by 3.0 per cent, land tenure (scarcity of farm land) by 7.7 per cent, and low capital by 17.5 per cent. Only 460 respondents out of a total of 2,340, or 19.7 per cent, identified poor development of infrastructure and 11.5 per cent low markets (see Table 2).

However, the intensity of these problems varies from community to community. On lack of access roads, Dikenafai (16.13 per cent), Isiekenesi (12.9 per cent), Nkwerre (12.9 per cent) and Owerre Nkwoji (12.9 per cent) communities of Orlu Zone are the most challenged. The only road linking Dikenafai and Isiekenesi to the Okigwe–Enugu Expressway is a dirt road, which is dusty and untarred. Similarly the only road linking Orlu–Nkwerre–Owerre Nkwoji and finally joining the Okigwe–Enugu Expressway is riddled with potholes, which gives a bumpy ride and leads to frequent breakdown of cars plying the road. Communities less challenged by the lack of access roads are Enyiogugu (3.23 per cent), Ifakala (3.23 per cent), Otulu (3.23 per cent) and Umuna (3.23 per cent). Irregular means of transportation such as trekking (going by foot), use of bicycles and motor bikes for long-distance journeys as opposed to buses and cars were commonly cited in those communities constrained the most by lack of access roads. These irregular means of transportation hinder these women from moving their produce effectively: in Dikenafai 20 per cent are constrained, in Isiekenesi 10 per cent, and in Nkwerre 10 per cent. Others equally constrained by irregular means of transportation are women in Okuku (10 per cent), Orodo (10 per cent), Owerre Nkwoji (20 per cent) and Umuna (20 per cent).

Inadequate credit facilities constrain all the women in the study communities. However, communities such as Oguta (11.11 per cent), Nkwerre (9.26 per cent), Owerre Nkwoji (7.41 per cent), Umuna (7.41 per cent) and Amaraku (7.41 per cent) are the most challenged, while Enyiogugu, Ifakala, Isiekenesi, Mgbidi, Nguru Nwenkwo, Okuku, Orsu Obodo and Umunkwo are equally constrained at 5.56 per cent. Least constrained are Dikenafai (1.85 per cent), Okwelle (1.85 per cent), Orodo (3.7 per cent), Otulu (1.85 per cent) and Umuguma 53.7 per cent). Most of these study communities lack any micro-finance facilities, while many of the women do not posses the required collateral, especially land, with which to approach the bank. Only few communities have women constrained by absence of socio-economic facilities. They are Ifakala (14.29 per cent), Nguru Nwenkwo

(28.57 per cent), Okwelle (28.57 per cent), Otulu (14.29 per cent) and Umuguma (14.29 per cent). On the other hand, other study communities, namely Amaraku, Dikenafai, Enyiogugu, Isiekenesi, Mgbidi, Nkwerre, Oguta, Okuku, Orodo, Orsu-Obodo, Owerre Nkwoji, Umuna and Umunkwo, have the presence of schools, hospitals, post office and health facilities. While some communities have all the aforementioned socio-economic facilities and more, others have them in relative numbers.

Land tenure (scarcity of farmland) constrains women found in the densely populated communities studied. Those in Owerri Zone constrained by this factor are in Enyiogugu (11.11 per cent), Ifakala (5.56 per cent), Nguru Nwenkwo (11.11 per cent) and Orodo (11.11 per cent). In Okigwe Zone comparable results are found in Amaraku (11.11 per cent), Okwelle (5.56 per cent) and Umunkwo (11.11 per cent). On Orlu Zone the relative communities are in Mgbidi (5.56 per cent), Nkwerre (11.11 per cent), Orsu Obodo (5.56 per cent), Otulu (5.56 per cent) and Owerre Nkoji (5.56 per cent). The following communities had no respondents who identified land tenure as a constraint: Dikenafai, Isiekenesi, Oguta, Okuku, Umuguma and Umuna.

Almost all the women in the 18 study communities have the problem of low capital. The small scale of operation of women in rural informal sectors of the study area is occasioned by the low capital with which they operate. However, the intensity of this factor is higher for those in Amaraku (9.76 per cent), Mgbidi (9.76 per cent) and Otulu (976 per cent), perhaps because they are market towns on the major truck roads linking Imo State with other neighbouring states, wherein petty trade is highly concentrated. Poor development of other infrastructure, such as water and electricity, impedes the women of Umunkwo (10.9 per cent), Orsu Obodo (10.9 per cent), Okuku (8.7 per cent) and Ifakala (8.7 per cent) the most, in that order. Threshold population, also referred to as the low market factor, constrains those in Amaraku (3.7 per cent), Enyiogugu (7.41 per cent), Mgbidi (7.41 per cent), Nguru Nwenkwo (7.41 per cent), Oguta (14.81 per cent), Okuku (3.7 per cent), Okwelle (7.41 per cent), Orsu Obodo (14.81 per cent), Otulu (7.41 per cent), Owerre Nkwoji (3.7 per cent), Umuguma (7.41 per cent), Umuna (11.11 per cent) and Umunkwo (3.7 per cent).

In summary, while poor access roads are a significant problem in Dikenafai (16.3 per cent), this is a non-issue in Ifakala and Umuguma communities. Oguta community has the smallest number of factors (three) constraining rural women's informal economic activities in it., while Okwelle, Otulu and Umuguma have the greatest number of factors (seven) constraining rural women's informal economic activities in it. On the average there are six constraints facing the study communities, and of the 18 study communities eight are constrained by six factors.

Table 2: Constraints on Rural Women's Informal Economic Activities

Communities	Lack of Access Roads	Irregular Means of Trans.	Inadequate Credit Facilities	Absence of Socio-eco. Fac.	Land Tenure	Low Capital	Poor Dev. of Other Infras.	Low Mkt/ Threshold Population	Total
Amaraku	0	0	40	0	20	40	20	10	130
(%)	0	0	7.41	0	11.11	9.76	4.35	3.7	36.33
Dikenafai	50	20	10	0	0	20	30	0	130
(%)	16.13	20	1.85	0	0	4.88	6.52	0	49.38
Enyiogugu	10	0	30	0	20	20	30	20	130
(%)	3.23	0	5.56	0	11.11	4.88	6.52	7.41	38.71
Ifakala	10	0	30	10	10	30	40	0	130
(%)	3.23	0	5.56	14.29	5.56	7.32	8.7	0	44.66
Isiekenesi	40	10	30	0	0	20	30	0	130
(%)	12.9	10	5.56	0	0	4.88	6.52	0	39.86
Mgbidi	20	0	30	0	10	40	10	20	130
(%)	6.45	0	5.56	0	5.56	9.76	2.17	7.41	36.91
Nguru Nwenkwo	0	0	30	20	20	30	10	20	130
(%)	0	0	5.56	28.57	11.11	7.32	2.17	7.41	62.14
Nkwerre	40	10	50	0	20	0	10	0	130
(%)	12.9	10	9.26	0	11.11	0	2.17	0	45.44
Oguta	0	0	60	0	0	30	0	40	130
(%)	0	0	11.11	0	0	7.32	0	14.81	33.24
Okuku	20	10	30	0	0	20	40	10	130
(%)	6.45	10	5.56	0	0	4.88	8.7	3.7	39.29
Okwelle	20	0	10	20	10	30	20	20	130
(%)	6.45	0	1.85	28.57	5.56	7.32	4.35	7.41	61.51
Orodo	20	10	20	0	20	30	30	0	130
(%)	6.45	10	3.7	0	11.11	7.32	6.52	0	45.10
Orsu Obodo	0	0	30	0	10	0	50	40	130
(%)	0	0	5.56	0	5.56	0	10.9	14.81	36.83
Otulu	10	0	10	1010	40	30	20	130	
(%)	3.23	0	1.85	14.29	5.56	9.76	6.52	7.41	48.62
Owerri Nkwoji	40	20	40	0	10	10	0	10	130
(%)	12.9	20	7.41	0	5.56	2.44	0	3.7	52.01
Umuguma	20	20	20	10	0	10	30	20	130
(%)	6.45	20	3.7	14.29	0	2.44	6.52	7.41	60.81
Umuna	10	0	40	0	0	20	30	30	130
(%)	3.23	0	7.41	0	0	4.88	6.52	11.11	33.15
Umunkwo	0	0	30	0	20	20	50	10	130
(%)	0	0	5.56	0	11.11	4.88	10.9	3.7	36.15

Source: Author's fieldwork.

In the course of this study, a number of hypotheses were propounded for testing in this research. These hypotheses included the following:

Constraints of Production Inputs

H_0*: *A majority of rural women in Imo State engaged in informal economic activities do not have significant access to institutional finance.

H_1*: *A majority of rural women in Imo State engaged in informal economic activities have significant access to institutional finance.

In testing this hypotheses an analysis of two major responses (Yes, No) as it related to the number of respondents for the study (totalling 2,340) was used (see Table 3)

Table 3: Analysis of Z-Test of Rural Women's Access to Institutional Finance

Access to Institutional Finance	Proportion	Z Statistic	Pr>Z	Z Tabulated
Yes	0.1923	–9.41	1.0000	1.645

Source: Result of computer analysis

Table 3 is a summary of the results of the analysis. It shows that the Z Statistic is –9.41. Since this is less than the Z Tabulated value of 1.645, the test is not significant. Thus, we do not reject the null hypothesis (H_o). Therefore a majority of rural women in Imo State engaged in informal economic activities do not have significant access to institutional finance.

This implies that only few of the rural women engaged in informal economic activities in Imo State have access to institutional finance. This is likely to arise from the fact that, of the 18 communities studied only three have near-dormant/inactive women's co-operatives, which occasionally lend women money, only one community has women who receive soft loans from oil companies and just a couple of elite rural women claim they have obtained bank loans in the past from Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank and Peoples Bank.

H_0*: *A majority of rural women in Imo State engaged in informal economic activities do not have significant access to farm land/business premises.

H_1*: *A majority of rural women in Imo State engaged in informal economic activities,have significant access to farm land/business premises.

In testing this hypothesis, an analysis of two major responses (Yes, No) as it related to the number of respondents for the study (totalling 2, 340) was used.

Table 4: Analysis of Z-Test of Rural Women's Access to Farmland /Business Premises

Access to Farmland/Business Premises	Proportion	Z Statistic	Pr>Z	Z Tabulated
Yes	0.6966	6.01	<.0001	1.645

Source: Result of computer analysis

Table 4 is a summary of the results of the analysis. It shows that the Z Statistic is 6.01. Since this value is greater than the Z Tabulated value of 1.645, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative (H_1). That is, a majority of rural women in Imo State engaged in informal economic activities have significant access to farmland/business premises. There are more study communities with sufficient land for farming by women than those without sufficient land for farming. Many of the rural women in the study communities do not suffer gross land discriminatory cultural norms and land tenureship practices. Some communities have big periodic markets with sufficient stalls/stores and others without one have enough space for rural women to operate as itinerants hawkers. This explains why the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Constraints on Enhancing Facilities and Services

***H_0*: Rural women in Imo State do not have significant access to socio-economic services that enhance women's informal economic activities.**

***H_1*: Rural women in Imo State have significant access to socio-economic services that enhance women's informal economic activities.**

In testing this hypothesis, an analysis of two major responses (Yes, No) as it related to the number of respondents for the study (totalling 2,340) was used.

Table 5: Analysis of Z-Test of Rural Women's Access to Socio-Economic Services

Access to Socio- Economic Services	Proportion	Z Statistic	Pr>Z	Z Tabulated
Yes	0.4188	–2.48	0.9935	1.645

Source: Result of computer analysis

Table 5 is a summary of the results of the analysis. It shows that Z-calculated as –2.48. Since the Z Statistic value is less than the Z Tabulated value of 1.645, the test is not significant. That is, we do not reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Thus, a majority of rural women in Imo State do not have significant access to socio-economic services that enhance women's informal economic activities. This is because in most of the communities with an electricity supply, the supply is in fact erratic and not very regular. Many villages suffer from broken-down transformers that are ill maintained, except when the people through self-help rally round to effect repairs themselves. In many communities with boreholes, the boreholes frequently break down owing to age and lack of maintenance, while their service reservoirs are mere monuments adorning the rural landscape. Despite the presence of electricity and a potable water supply, the rural women still suffer from water/light inadequacy. Electricity bills and water rates are hardly affordable as a result of the predominance of low incomes. And government health services are rarely obtained at affordable charges. That is to say, the presence of socio-economic facilities in some of the communities does not necessarily translate to the fact that those services are provided as they ought to be. This thus distinguishes the presence of socio-economic facilities from access to socio-economic services.

H_0*: *Rural areas in Imo State do not have significant presence of socio-economic facilities that enhance women's informal economic activities.

H_i*: *Rural areas in Imo State have significant presence of socio-economic facilities that enhance women's informal economic activities.

In testing this hypothesis, an analysis of two major responses (Yes, No) was used as it related to the number of respondents for the study (totalling 2, 340).

Table 6: Analysis of Z-Test of Presence of Socio-economic Facilities in the Rural Area

Presence of Socio-Economic Facilities	Proportion	Z Statistic	Pr>Z	Z Tabulated
Yes	0.6325	4.05	<.0001	1.645

Source: Result of computer analysis

Table 6 is a summary of the results of the analysis. It shows that the Z Statistic is 4.05. Since this value is greater than the Z Tabulated value of 1.645, then the test is significant at 5% level. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and

accept the alternative (H_1). This means that a majority of rural areas in Imo State have significant presence of socio-economic facilities that enhance rural women's informal economic activities. Actually, many of the study communities have some level of presence of socio-economic facilities, namely: good access roads, good schools, hospitals and health facilities, bank and post office. This result only confirms the availability of socio-economic facilities that ought to enhance their activities as earlier stated, but questions their accessibility. This is because for one reason or another most of the rural people do not utilize these facilities at all or rather do not utilize them to their fullest. Some of these facilities that functioned in the past are not functional now or where functional are unaffordable by the great majority. And this invariably constrains rural women's informal economic activities, which range from food processing to vocational/handicraft activities in the study area.

Policy Implications

What is the policy significance of this research? It is known that Nigeria has created a bias in the policy framework in favour of the formal sector. This may be attributed to the belief of the government that modernization is synonymous with development, or it may be attributed to insufficient awareness of and information on this sector. The bias is sometimes attributed to the existence of a formal sector 'lobby', which has privileged access to policymaking in the government. In Nigeria policies are not specifically designed for the informal sector; furthermore the absence of such policies can have a negative effect on the informal sector, by limiting participation in it and constraining responses to opportunities for expansion but distorting the incentive structures.

It is essential that policies be so designed as to encourage the effective participation of the informal sector in development. The primary reason for creating a supportive policy framework lies in the promotion of efficiency and growth in the overall economy. These policies, besides increasing the demand potential for informal sector output, may also contribute to faster transformation of the units concerned: policies favouring technological transfer and upgrading, closer linkages with modern sector firm and trading policies etc.

As part of the evidence from this study, there is an expressed desire by the rural women engaged in informal economic activity to earn higher income in the village. We then come to the conclusion that in order to improve the standard of living in rural Nigeria, Federal Government policies and programmes for small and medium-scale enterprises should be re-engineered

and vigourously pursued in both the urban and rural areas of the country, or At the least policy changes should be made to ease constraints.

There are at least four reasons why policymakers in Nigeria should pay greater attention to the rural informal sector: resource allocation; income disparities, due to market imperfections; rural poverty; and the rapid expansion of the sector. The policies and programmes of Industrial Development Centres (IDCs), the Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industries (NBCI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), The Peoples Bank of Nigeria (micro-finance bank), community banks, NERFUND, Central Bank of Nigeria/World Bank-Assisted SME Loan Scheme and State Programmes should be revised.

There are available proposals on how to achieve these laudable objectives (Obadan et al. 1995). They include improving accessibility to product markets, improving and strengthening liquidity and the capital base, strengthening the infrastructural base, adding flexibility in the regulatory framework, strengthening training and technical capability, and the promotion of welfare programmes and development of informal sector organizations. We suggest that a concerted effort on enhancing rural women's informal economic activities in Imo State in its interrelated forms mounted by government agencies through a policy of citizen participation, especially women's participation, can do much to improve the rural living standards.

Policy Recommendations

Policies that eliminate restrictions that currently prevent rural women's informal enterprises from participating in public bids for supplies, and those that promote subcontracting arrangements between informal and formal operators. to ensure expanded markets and upgrade the technological capacity in the informal sector, are highly recommended.

Conclusion

The investigation revealed that petty commodity production and commerce is an important sector in Nigeria's rural economy. Rural women's participation in this sphere has increased owing to the harsh economic realities prevalent in the nation. The study further showed that though rural women are engaged in a number of income-generating activities, these activities are hampered by a multitude of constraints. Rural women should acquire relevant vocational skills, which the government can provide through mobile training institutions tagged 'schools on wheels'.

This study shows that the rural women are faced with several problems in their means of livelihood. These problems significantly affect rural women's informal economic activities in the study area. Notable among them are lack of access to institutional finance, inadequate credit facilities, low capital,

lack of access to socio-economic facilities/services and poor development/ maintenance of infrastructure, among others.

Hence, for poverty reduction, reduction in rural–urban migration and overall development of the rural parts of Imo State, these constraints must be drastically reduced. Generally, this can be achieved through the strengthening of women's ministries and agencies, the creation of functional and efficient formal and non-formal financial institutions, the strengthening of the rural infrastructural base, the modification of the legal and institutional framework, and more efficient policy/programme formulation and implementation by the government and donor agencies.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 103–124

(ISSN 0850-3907)

Mutual Gains from Hostile Confrontations: Land Boards, Their Clients and 'Self-allocation' in Botswana

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Abstract

This article argues that hostile confrontations between state and societal actors pursuing divergent goals can sometimes end up empowering both. In Botswana, successful efforts by less powerful clients to reclaim the power to allocate land from land boards through various stratagems ended up also strengthening the land boards and also the state. By tricking land boards into legitimizing plots on which they had squatted, clients brought their land interests to the awareness of the land board and contributed to bettering land board records. The better records enable land boards to allocate land and resolve disputes in more informed ways. Better records also provide state officials with valuable information that various state agencies can use to tax, police, plan and implement various social projects better. In presenting this argument, the article contributes to the state-in-society discourse by showing that we need not limit the possibility of positive sum gains to situations where state and societal actors collaborate to achieve mutual goals.

Résumé

Cet article soutient que les confrontations hostiles entre l'État et les acteurs de la société poursuivant des objectifs divergents peuvent parfois finir par rendre ces deux parties plus fortes. Au Botswana, les efforts réussis de clients moins puissants pour reconquérir le pouvoir d'attribution des terres détenu par les groupements de propriétaires terriens à travers divers stratagèmes ont également fini par renforcer ces derniers ainsi que l'État. En bernant les groupements de propriétaires terriens à la légitimation de parcelles sur lesquelles ils squattaient, des clients a amené ces derniers à prendre conscience de leurs intérêts terriens et a contribué à l'amélioration de leurs acquis. Cette amélioration des acquis

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permet groupements de propriétaires terriens d'attribuer les terres et de résoudre les différends de manière plus informée. En outre, elle donne aux autorités de l'État de précieuses informations que les différents organismes étatiques peuvent utiliser pour mieux taxer, suivre, planifier et mettre en œuvre divers projets sociaux. Dans la présentation de cet argument, cet article contribue ainsi à l'approche État dans la société en montrant qu'il ne faut pas limiter la possibilité d'augmentation des acquis positifs dans des situations où l'État et les acteurs de la société collaborent pour atteindre des objectifs communs.

Introduction

In February 2004, I attended an allocation exercise where a state-created subordinate land board in Botswana convened at a village to allocate land, settle land disputes, document existing land interests, and authenticate land transfers. Many clients went to the board seeking land documents claiming, among other things, that their original certificates of customary land grant had been destroyed by floods or had been eaten by insects or cattle. Land board members suspected many clients of committing the offence of self-allocation, in which clients had illegally squatted on land and tried to fool the board into legitimizing their activities by claiming lost certificates. Land board members conceded that since the land board lacked good records of past allocations it was difficult to prove the (in)validity of claims, and reluctantly agreed to issue 'new' certificates.

These stratagems by villagers are examples of the 'everyday forms of resistance' (Scott 1985:xvi) that the peasantry deploys to work state imposed systems 'to its advantage – or rather to its minimum disadvantage' (Hobsbawm 1973:13). Scholars recognize the potentially devastating effects of these acts on grand state designs (Scott 1990:188–95; Migdal 1988: 33; Herbst 2000:18; Hyden 1983:194). In the literature on state–society relations *hostile confrontations* between state administrators and social actors are presented as zero-sum games in which the triumph of one party comes at the expense of the other (Migdal 1988:33; Hyden 1983:194). This view even extends to the state-in-society perspective, which explicitly considers mutually empowering state–society interactions (Kohli and Shue 1994:323). In this literature, occasions of mutual empowerment are limited to those non-antagonistic interactions when state and societal actors set out to achieve mutual gains based on convergent goals (Kohli and Shue 1994:321; Migdal 1994:24–5; Evans 1995:49). Migdal, one of the editors of the pioneering volume on the state-in-society approach, thus notes that in cases where there is a 'struggle for agency, for the ultimate autonomy to take initiatives and to make decisions in given realms … the struggle is one marked not by mutual empowerment but by mutually exclusive goals' (Migdal 1994:24).

This paper pushes the state-in-society debate further by arguing that we need not limit the possibility of positive sum gains to situations where state and societal actors collaborate to achieve mutual goals. To do this I engage literatures on property rights, the uses of knowledge and information systems and state–society relations. I argue that *hostile confrontations* between state and societal actors pursuing divergent goals can sometimes end up empowering both. In contemporary Botswana, successful efforts by peasants to reappropriate the power to allocate land from land boards and their central state bosses end up also strengthening land boards and the state. Land board officials and state authorities detest and try to stop these deceptive devices, mostly in vain. But by fooling land boards into documenting their self-allocated plots and thus bringing these land interests to the attention of the land board, clients contribute to bettering land board records and the state's land information system. The better records enhances land boards' ability to engage in informed dispute resolution and land allocation and limits the extent to which clients can rob them of land allocation powers. Separately, better records also provide other state agencies with information that can use to tax, police, and plan and implement social projects (Interview 9).

Primary data for this research was gathered during five months of field research in Botswana. I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, many informal discussions, and attended land board and land tribunal meetings in Central, Kweneng, Kgatleng, Northeast and Gaborone districts. During one of my trips, I was privileged to participate in the operations of the Mahalapye subordinate land board. My experiences of the activities of this subordinate land board deeply informed my understanding of the micro-politics of land transactions. I have omitted the names of informants to keep their identities secret.

In the section that immediately follows, I discuss and outline the centralizing and domineering designs of states with particular emphasis on the Batswana state and its efforts at reorganizing land administration. Next, I discuss various modes of resistance deployed by clients to take back powers to allocate land from the land boards. The following section examines how successful resistance by clients ends up strengthening land boards and the state. In the conclusion, I draw on this analysis to suggest a broader line of research project on the impact of successful resistance by social actors on states.

Confrontations as Zero-sum Games: Land Boards and Self-allocation

The creation of the modern-nation state and its efforts at administering and transforming society has meant a centralization and deployment of powers formerly held by various local chieftains to tax, police, prosecute wars, and transform society in very intrusive and coercive ways (Anderson 1979; Spruyt

1994:153; Tilly 1990:63; Migdal 1994:11–13; Weber 1946:78; Evans 1995:5). The creation of colonial states in Africa followed a similar logic even if only in aspiration (Herbst 2000:17–31; Bratton 1994:233). Traditional leaders that previously enjoyed vast powers became at least de jure subordinates to colonial and postcolonial state leaders (Arhin 1985; Proctor 1968).

In Africa, Botswana has to be considered as one of the states that have achieved considerable success in transforming its society (Samatar 1999). At independence in 1966, it was one of the more hopeless new states (Picard 1985:19), seemingly lacking significant minerals and fertile soils suitable for export agriculture. The discovery of diamond reserves after independence in 1966 gave the state huge resources. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which has ruled the country since independence, has used these resources to transform the country into one of the most prosperous on the continent. The BDP has sought with considerable success to tightly control the mining and marketing of diamonds, reform and boost the cattle sector, provide various services for its citizens, and fund a burgeoning education sector (Samatar 1999).

The land sector is one area that has felt the heavy hand of the state. The first National Development Plan, released in 1968, stated with regard to land that 'The need for reform is recognized and detailed study of the possible changes which might be introduced is being made.' The goals were to render land a 'fully negotiable asset' and give 'progressive farmers' greater security 'than that available under customary law' (Botswana 1968a:10). The Tribal Land Act passed in 1968 has been the main instrument employed by the state to reorganize the administration of tribal lands, which constituted 70 per cent of all lands in Botswana by 2004 (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:61–3). Tribal/customary lands in Botswana are lands whose ownership is vested in whole communities. Formerly, chiefs and since 1968, land boards as custodians, administer these lands on behalf of communities. Various group members can acquire exclusive user rights for various lengths of time in tribal land. Despite the continuing use of the word 'tribal', Section 10 of the Tribal Land (Amendment) Act of 1993 made these lands in principle the property of all citizens of Botswana and the land boards stewards of all Batswana, even if their perception as agents of various 'tribes' still continues in the popular imagination (Nyamnjoh 2007: 311; Werbner 2004:109:30).

The Tribal Land Act was a very disruptive instrument even though it sought to maintain the customary land tenure to which customary lands were subject. Section 3 of the Act provided for the creation of land boards across the country, while Section 13 transferred all powers formerly held by traditional chiefs in the administration and management of land to land boards. The staff and members of these land boards were subject to appointment

and/or dismissal by the Minister for Lands and Housing. The membership of land boards has been reformed over time (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:50–2). By 2004, board members were elected by villagers at the *kgotla* (in Setswana, *kgotla* is a discursive and deliberative body made up of citizens of an area and presided over by the chief; it also refers to the physical structure where these meetings take place [Thapelo 1997:2; Molosiwa 1999:51]) from a pool selected by a committee headed by the district commissioner (Interview 11), ensuring that board members remained 'agents of the central government' (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:52) As Kalabamu and Morolong (2004:48–9) note, by creating the land boards, 'the government had enable[d] itself to define and enforce rules on access, use and disposal of tribal land'. Main Land Boards were established in 1970 and subordinate land boards in 1973 (Mathuba n.d.:4; Wynne 1989:1). By 2004 there were 12 main land boards and 39 subordinate land boards across the country (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:51).

Over time, the offence of self-allocation has become a central preoccupation of land board members (Werbner 1980:135–45). In 2004, the punishment for self-allocation was the hefty sum of 10,000 pula (around US$3,000), a year in jail and possible demolition of the properties and seizure of the land (Interview 32). The power to allocate land presents board members with a powerful instrument, which they can potentially use to achieve various ends including aiding state development plans and gaining influence for political careers (Comaroff 1980:108; Werbner 1980:135–45). Board members need to reinforce their monopoly over land allocation so they can deploy that power to their chosen ends. If everyone can allocate land, board members will have no power to deploy. The unauthorized allocation of land by any other person fractionally dissipates their power hence their distaste for the offence of self-allocation.

In the next section I show that threats of a year in jail and a 10,000 pula fine have not dissuaded many from successfully prizing significant land allocation power from the land boards through the practice of self-allocation. I then discuss how these successful efforts at resistance paradoxically strengthen land boards and the state.

Hostile, But Wily Resistance to Land Board Allocation Powers

More powerful actors have often overtly resisted land boards in Botswana (Werbner 2004:111–12; Nyamnjoh 2007:308–9). But my observation of interactions between state land agents and less powerful social actors revealed that there have been continuous and significantly successful efforts by these actors to reappropriate the power to allocate land from land boards. Scott has noted that because peasants are dispersed over large areas, are often not

formally organized, and lack means of coercion comparable to the dominant, 'they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority' (Scott 1985:xvi). Peasants often resort to weapons such as the manipulation of knowledge and ignorance that reinforce their hands in these struggles (Scott 1990:133). Acts of resistance by less powerful Batswana have taken the form of continuous low-scale resistance, employing knowledge instead of coercive force as a weapon of choice. Their strategy has been to manipulate the new system to take land allocation powers from land boards (Wynne 1989:387–89) instead of openly denying the monopoly of land boards over the power to allocate land.

Knowledge and ignorance have become key weapons in the struggle between land boards and their less powerful clients over the ability to allocate land (Wynne 1989:387–9). Long ago Hayek distinguished between the 'scientific knowledge' of central state officials and 'knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place' of locals (Hayek 1945:521). He emphasized the importance of knowledge of local circumstances to processes of governance. The effort to transform society by state officials requires bureaucrats to integrate knowledge of local realities into general scientific knowledge that will direct the exercise of state power (Hayek 1945:521; Scott 1998:313). Central state officials are often aware of the importance of such knowledge (Scott 1998:23). Where officials lack sufficient knowledge of local circumstances, they will be unable to direct the exercise of state power in ways that will bring about the targeted transformation (Wynne 1989:426). *Worse still, crafty locals with such local knowledge will be able to use it to divert state power in ways that are contrary to state goals*.

Chiefs, as the administrators of land and depositories of land information before the creation of land boards, were very rich in this local knowledge. Land board members were from these same localities but, like other ordinary citizens, did not have comprehensive information on the history of land parcels beyond their immediate vicinity (Wynne 1989:194). State officials in Botswana early on recognized that land boards needed to know existing land interests to avoid creating conflicting interests by allocating lands that had already been given to others by chiefs. Boards also needed to know the extent and locations of existing land interests so as to document them and settle land disputes.

To reduce these information problems, state officials arranged for chiefs to sit on the new land boards as sources of local knowledge (Botswana 1968b:30; Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:51). Many chiefs exploited this position to continue allocating land, to the chagrin of state and land board officials. Chiefs were removed completely from land boards in 1984

(Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:51). They can still nominate land overseers, who are 'junior staff within the tribal administration' controlled by chiefs to serve as conduits of local knowledge to land boards (Interviews 20 and 22). These land overseers are supposed to vet applications for land, visit plots and sign off on applications guaranteeing that there are no encumbrances on such parcels before the land boards accept applications (Interview 22). Land overseers are also supposed to travel with land board members during allocation and dispute-resolution trips (Interview 22; Wynne 1989:368–70). Many of them shirk these responsibilities and/or deliberately mislead land boards.

Given the boards' lack of local information, many locals have employed their superior local knowledge relative to land boards to reclaim significant power over land allocation from the land boards. To understand these actors' efforts to resist land board monopolization of the power to allocate land we should reflect briefly on their motivations.

Understanding Differing Motivations

Because land boards took over land administration powers previously exercised by chiefs, it is understandable that many chiefs and their land overseers resent and resist land boards (Wynne 1989:32, 316–26; Botswana 1968b:30–1). It is not as clear why some clients seek to undermine land boards given what de Soto points out as the beneficial effects for the poor of land documentation (2000). It is supposed to allow land holders to use land as collateral, reduce costly disputes and protect the poor from expropriation. The people I write of here mostly welcome and deliberately seek to document their land parcels. What they object to is the monopoly of the land board over land allocation. They want to determine which parcels the land board should document for them.

Peoples' feelings towards land boards are not monolithic. Comaroff, Werbner and Wynne (Comaroff 1980:108–10; Werbner 2004:80; Wynne 1989:390) provide evidence of how some well-connected individuals embraced and colluded with board members to amass land. Because of the nature of the argument here, I focus on lowly clients lacking connections to board and state officials who seek nonetheless to exercise autonomy over which lands they occupy, use, and/or dispose of. Some of these clients did not recognize the authority of land boards to regulate various transactions that they could once conclude with their neighbors without state interference (Werbner 1980:144–7). Further, as land boards froze the allocation of plots in certain areas and created long waiting lists for land applicants, many people preferred the convenience of getting land when they wanted it.

Of Floods, Fires, and Other Unfortunate Events

Faced with an allocation structure they did not always agree with, clients have invented ways of taking land and forcing land boards to legitimize and document these allocations. In Mahalapye, as in other villages in the country, people used three main strategies. They came to the subordinate land board seeking documentation of rights to parcels of land they were already using, claiming variously that: (1) the lands were given to them by chiefs before the land boards had been created and had never been documented; (2) earlier land boards had given them the land but had not issued them with documents; and (3) their documents had been destroyed or lost. Where people claimed they had lost their documents, the main culprits were the floods that occasionally occur in the Mahalapye–Palapye flood plain. Other reasons cited for the loss of documents included children mistakenly lighting fires with them, insects and animals eating certificates and documents getting lost. These demands for documentation dominated the business of the Mahalapye Subordinate Land Board during their allocation exercise in February 2004 (Interviews 24, 25, 31, 32, 33; observation of proceedings at land board meetings).

When faced with such narratives, land board members suspected people of trying to legitimize self-allocated plots. They rightly related the audacity of people to the weak information systems of land boards. The creation of land records was one of the main reasons that the state gave for establishing land boards (Machacha 1986). But record-keeping has been a big weakness of land boards. Because of a lack of trained personnel and logistics, many boards initially granted lands without making proper records or issuing certificates (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:49). Where they issued certificates, they attached only rough hand-drawn sketches with distances often measured in foot-paces (Interview 53). Many of the land boards I visited did not have functional records past 1990. Where pre-1990 records existed, they were in such a decrepit and disorganized state that routinely resorting to them was a near impossibility for boards, given their resource limitations.

Land board members resist the dissipation of their power to allocate land by people they consider to be ignorant and lowly. They try very hard to stifle clients by asking which chief or land board made the allocation and when it was made. They seek information and signed affidavits from chiefs and neighboring land holders, contact past board officials and staff, and inspect plots to see if boundary posts are newly erected (Interviews 25, 32; observation of land board meetings).

These efforts bear limited fruit because old board members often lack the necessary memory, chiefs and neighbors can be convinced to vouch for

land claims, and people can learn the names of board members from when they intend to claim they were given land. Yet still I witnessed some of those rare occasions when board members are able to 'prove' self-allocation. At one sitting, a lady came seeking the documentation of land that a certain chief had allegedly allocated to her relative, who was born in 1970. She might not have realized that chiefs lost their power to allocate land when land boards were established in 1970. Further, since the person had been born in 1970, the allocation must have taken place only recently when land boards were well established. She was either lying or trying to legalize an illegal grant by a chief. In another case, a person came to document land in a certain part of the village claiming he had been allocated but not given documents by an earlier land board. Land board members were quick to point out that it was widely known that the area had not been inhabited or used previously in the recent history of the village. Both parties resorted to the time-tested story of missing documents. But the board put their applications aside and informed them that they would be investigated and possibly punished for self-allocation (Interview 24; observation of land board meeting).

In most cases, the land board documented the rights of claimants. Members agreed that while they believed people were trying to legitimize self-allocated plots, they could not prove it because of the lack of records (Interviews 24, 25, 32, 33; observation of land board meetings). Earlier, land boards could refuse documentation based on these suspicions. But the creation of the Land Tribunal in 1997 under the Tribal Land (Establishment of Land Tribunals) Order, Statutory Instrument No. 59 of 1995, changed the incentive structure facing land boards. The Land Tribunal deals specifically with appeals by aggrieved individuals and groups against land board decisions. The Tribunal has held land boards to the strict letter of the law, leading to a string of land board losses to clients that had by 2004 motivated many boards to permanently employ lawyers for legal advice and representation at the Tribunal (Interview 27).

Land board members are no longer willing to risk embarrassing losses at the Tribunal by rejecting applications for documentation based on mere suspicions. A subordinate land board member stated that 'Self allocation is a big problem here. We cannot trace old records, but we cannot risk losing at the Land Tribunal by making a decision based on suspicion without evidence.'. He pointed out that 'people in Xhosa I and Tshikinyega always claim floods washed away their land certificates, but when we ask them their marriage licenses, death certificates or party membership cards are never destroyed by the floods and fire' (Interview 25). Another board member pointed out that 'Most of the time we know they are lying. We threaten them with the

10.000 pula fine and one year in jail, but we have no way of proving that they are lying. Our lack of records forces us to be lenient. We just regularize the claims that they make' (Interview 32). An even more despondent board member complained that 'People have greed over land. Most of their certificates were not swept by flood. People have cattle brand certificates, birth certificates except their land certificates. The DC [district commissioner] is not complaining about reregistering birth and marriage certificates' (Interview 33). The exasperated tone and accusations of duplicity of these board members reminds one of the frustrations that led one Japanese landlord to wonder: 'Does anyone lie as much as a peasant?' (Scott 1990:18).

Are people really reappropriating the power to allocate land or are these just the rants of paranoid board members? The fact that people who commit this 'illegality' have little incentive to admit it to those outside their in-group makes clear-cut evidence of the stratagem of reappropriation difficult to come by. Yet still there is evidence of self-allocation and the ongoing struggles over the power to allocate land between land boards and various societal actors. In response to surveys by Kalabamu and Morolong in Old Mogoditshane and New Mogoditshane close to the capital Gaborone after 2001, 5 and 4 per cent respectively of participants admitted to self-allocation (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:148). Given the widespread knowledge of extensive self-allocation, particularly in those peri-urban areas, Kalabamu and Morolong rightly put the low figures down to the 'fear of admitting wrongdoing in a country where the culture detests disobedience to authority or to fear of retribution' (Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:148) (which includes the occasional and recent demolition of illegal houses by the state).

The two cases highlighted above in which land board members through rigorous questioning were able to uncover illegal allocations are only two of what land board members claim are many cases of self allocation that they were able to expose.

We see further evidence of these hostile efforts by Batswana to retake land allocation power from land boards in the wily and illegal conversion of farms into residential plots around the country. In Borotsi ward in Bobonong, many land users sensed the gradual extension of Bobonong village in their direction and anticipated rising land values and the repossession of their farms for conversion into residential plots by the land board. They subdivided their farms, built houses, and dished out land to others as 'gifts' from the late 1990s. When they were confronted by the Bobonong Subordinate Land Board, they claimed among other things that the new houses were just homesteads on their farms, that the builders were family members and that they were not making any efforts to change the land from agricultural to

residential use. More interestingly, they claimed that in any case Borotsi was outside the limits of Bobonong and therefore the Bobonong Subordinate Land Board had no jurisdiction over their farms. They said they would talk to the land board and register their holdings once the village reached them! (Interview 35). Exasperated board members have had to look on as people convert their farms into residential property under the guise of allowing 'family members' to build homesteads to enhance their proximity to farms.

The case of *masoko* in Bobirwa Sub-District provides more evidence of success by societal members in their efforts to prise valuable land allocation power out of the hands of land boards. *Masoko* are shallow wells dug in dry river beds from which cattle ranchers can use machines to pump water into troughs. These are supposed to be temporary spring wells that get covered by sand when rivers begin to flow. People do not need land board approval to dig these wells. But they do need such approval to sink permanent boreholes. The Tribal Land Act (1968) does not distinguish between *masoko* as opposed to boreholes. Cunning cattle ranchers have seized on this loophole to engage in what the land board sees as self-allocation. They use explosives and heavy earth-moving equipment to sink very deep permanent wells close to river beds. When the land board accuses them of self-allocation and sinking boreholes without approval, ranchers retort that these are mere *masoko*, that the land board has no right to allocate land in river beds and that the law allows for *masoko*. An irate board staff noted that 'when we approach them they claim the law allows them to dig *masoko*. If we press them, they hire lawyers who ask us to produce a legal definition of *masoko*' (Interview 36).

Reflecting on the difficulty states face in imposing their designs on peasants in Tanzania, Hyden noted that 'In this situation, it is understandable if the development equation is often reduced to a zero-sum game. The African peasant is hardly a hero in the light of current development thinking, but by using his deceptive skills he has often defeated the authorities' (Hyden 1980:231). But do these successful efforts at reclaiming the power to allocate land also empower land boards and central state officials? I argue below that what seems like a zero-sum game and thorough defeat of the state on the surface in actual fact also significantly empowers land boards and central state officials.

Empowering Land Boards and the State

By tricking land boards into legitimizing their interests, people bring themselves into the purview of land boards and contribute to updating the land information system of the land boards. Better land information systems are critical to the ability of land boards to allocate land and resolve land disputes in informed ways. Further, better information systems limit the extent to

which societal members can chip away at the monopoly of land boards over the power to allocate land. Better information systems also enable central state officials to tax, plan, and provide various social services.

The Nature and Role of Land Information Systems

State authorities need accurate information systems to enable them achieve their ends of social transformation (Scott 1998:183). Land information systems create and keep information on the location and dimensions of various parcels of land, interests in these parcels and various transactions concerning land parcels. These systems could take the form of chiefs and elders that act as repositories of information on land parcels or land title and deeds registries. Maps indicating the dimensions, locations, interests, and transactions in land parcels represent easily visualized examples of such land information systems.

My argument incorporates Black's (1997:22) view that maps have been key instruments in the furtherance of the dominating and transformative projects of rulers. Of particular interest here is the role of land information systems as the eyes that direct the use of state power to achieve various ends including 'vaccinat[ing] a population, … tax[ing] people and their property, … conscript[ing] soldiers' (Scott 1998:183), generating markets and facilitating land transactions (de Soto 2000:ch. 3). Often, this goal of generating market activity masks the redistributive uses to which these information systems are put. The creation of maps and registration of various land instruments do not just capture interests as they are on the ground. They also create new interests and eliminate others (Ngugi 2004:476). As in the US, colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe these systems were deployed by the powerful to facilitate, legitimize, and calcify land seizures from the less powerful. In other cases this redistributive result is a non-deliberate effect. New land documentation systems allow the wily to register instruments for lands in which they have no interests at the expense of less knowledgeable and influential owners (Scott 1998:48).

This utility of land information systems is matched by the difficulty of amassing such information systems. It is a costly exercise, requiring expertise in surveying, recording and documentation, and a presence of the state across its territory. Land boards earlier on struggled badly with the tasks of documenting and keeping records on land interests because they lacked trained staff and equipment (Machacha 1986; Kalabamu and Morolong 2004:49). Land information systems are also highly susceptible to what Thelen and Streeck call 'drift', which occurs when the failure to 'recalibrate and renegotiate' institutions in line with changing social realities over time results in their demise (Thelen and Streeck 2005: 24). Land transactions of various

sorts are constantly going on, so in order for a land information system to be accurate, it has to be constantly updated to reflect these changes. Not updating these records is tantamount to actively distorting them.

I do not intend to claim that state officials always intend the information systems they advertise to truly reflect relevant realities. The point I am making here is that state authorities need accurate information systems to enable them achieve their ends, including the end of deliberately putting out false information, as they often chose to do. Often, authorities put out information systems that reflect their aspirations – how they wish or intend realities to be (Black 1997:18). In 1970 the *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (FUNAI) in Brazil issued land titles to cattle ranchers for 'uninhabited' land in the Guapore valley in the Amazon, which turned out to be the 'homeland of the Namibiquara' people. Given the zealous advocacy of the head of FUNAI to 'develop' Indian reserves, this silence or non-recognition of the existence of the Namibiquara has to be interpreted as strategic blindness (Hecht and Cockburn 1989:138). FUNAI needed accurate information to enable it to declare as waste or uninhabited landed properties of the Namibiquara instead of those of powerful loggers and mineral prospectors. The colonial government in Kenya similarly declared areas of the country, which it wanted to expropriate from blacks for exclusive white use, as 'waste land of which it had the right and duty to make disposal in the way which it deemed best for the country at large' (Kenya 1933:12) This declaration was preceded by careful and extensive studies on the boundaries and holdings of various groups (Kenya 1933) to enable it declare as waste land the holdings of the Masai and other African groups instead of the holdings of powerful European settlers like Lord Delamere.

Coming into the Purview of the State

By tricking boards into legitimizing their self-allocated plots, people contribute to the land information systems of the state. They emerge from the shadows into the purview of the state, eliminating the information barricades that hide the dominated from elites and so guarantee them some freedom from interference (Scott 1990:132). Speaking of this breaking of information barricades in the West in highly positive terms, de Soto notes that 'Once inside a formal property system, owners lost their anonymity. By becoming inextricably linked to real estate and businesses that could be easily identified and located, people forfeited the ability to lose themselves in the masses' (2000:55).

While de Soto is right in pointing out one of the effects of title registries, it is not clear that clients always valorize this loss of anonymity, as Scott (1990:133) shows in reference to strenuous efforts by Southeast Asian

peasants to escape the gaze of inquisitive colonial officials. Similarly, in Kenya state efforts at registering land in Coast Province in the early 1960s met stubborn resistance by some land holders. For instance, when approached by state agents to agree to registration efforts, the elders of Rabai, Kilifi District curtly told the Government Agent that 'wa-Rabai know their *shamba* [farm] boundaries and … they do not feel like the government should put them on the ground' (Kenya National Archives) They (rightly) suspected that knowing and demarcating their boundaries was a first step in the eventual expropriation of their lands. These efforts to escape the gaze of the more powerful are not limited to the poor and powerless. When the naturalist von Humboldt as the agent of the Spanish king went to the Amazon to collect cartographic data and specimens at the end of the eighteenth century, Brazilian officials regarded Humboldt and other scientists and cartographers from Europe and the US with great suspicion. Speaking of the assiduous efforts of Humboldt, one Brazilian official remarked that 'I never saw anyone measure so carefully land that was not his' (Hecht and Cockburn 1989:7). When one notes the designs of other nations on the Amazon and continuing talk about the internationalization of the forest, this suspicion was warranted.

Given the potential benefits of land documentation to the poor and powerless that are touted by de Soto (2000), such occasional resistance of land documentation by land users is puzzling. But this is so only because de Soto completely neglects the almost inevitable negative distributional consequences of titling and other documentation efforts for clients that I point out above. Fear of these distributional consequences and the use of land documentation efforts to aid taxation ensure that the poor and powerless are not always eager to embrace efforts at documenting land interests (Scott 1998:48).

Against this background we can see why the willing emergence of Batswana land users from the shadows into the land information system of the state constitutes a boon for state efforts at compiling and updating land information systems. Batswana were providing the state with valuable information with which it could perform various tasks, and without which it is bound to fail in its transformative projects.

Enhancing the Power of Land Boards and of the State

The better land board records that result from people fooling land boards into legitimizing their self-allocated plots benefit land boards by enhancing their power to engage in informed dispute resolution and land allocation. Over time it also limits the extent to which clients and land overseers can cunningly rob them of the power to allocate land. Better records help the

state by providing it with information that they can use to tax, police, and plan and implement various social projects better (Interview 9).

It is important to separate discussions of how land boards and central state officials are empowered because we should not assume that what empowers land boards empowers central state officials and vice versa. Principal–agent theory and the literature on rent-seeking would lead us to expect that board members might have preferences different from those of their central state principals. Board members might even prefer to hide their records from central state bureaucrats to increase their discretion in land allocation and conflict resolution.

Regardless of how board members decide to use their records, better records empower land boards by boosting their ability to monopolize the power to allocate land and to engage in land allocation and dispute resolution in more informed ways. Ignorance of existing land interests has fundamentally undermined the ability of land boards to make informed allocation decisions and led them into creating conflicting interests (Wynne 1989:431–7; Interviews 25, 32). There are many people in Botswana who own but do not develop or mark plots. Sometimes, others not knowing of the interests in these plots apply to the land board for the same land parcels. Land boards then allocate these plots thereby creating conflicting interests through double allocation (Interviews 14, 21). The emergence of the old owner causes conflict and makes boards look inept and ridiculous in the eyes of clients and central state officials. As more people bring their land interests to the attention of the land board through various means, the board gains better knowledge of existing interests and so is able to reduce the extent to which it engages in double allocation. Also, once a person brings their interests to the land board, it makes it more difficult for them to fool the board later by claiming a more extensive parcel.

Bringing their existing land interests to the attention of the land board through various stratagems also boosts the ability of boards to resolve disputes. To make informed decisions when they are faced with disputes over boundaries, encroachment and conflicting interests, they need to know the location and dimensions of interests as well as ongoing transactions. As people bring their claims to the attention of the land board, enabling the board to better its land information system, the boards will find it easier to resolve these disputes.

Importantly, land board members are acutely aware of the need to expand and upgrade their records. They have employed radio announcements and *kgotla* meetings to encourage people to documents their interests (Interviews 27, 33). This is partly a deliberate effort to take advantage of much improved

land board information-gathering and storing capabilities, which include better-trained staff, GPS equipment and the gradual introduction of computerized information management systems. *The manipulation of knowledge by clients to reappropriate the power to allocate land from the land boards gives people a non-illegal means through which they can fulfill the wishes of – and bring their interests to the attention of – the land boards and the state.*

The empowering effects of the hostile actions of clients go beyond land boards to other state agencies. The information systems that people contribute to through their stratagems, aid the Department of Taxes to assess and collect rental income, capital gains and inheritance taxes. The state also uses this information to monitor and police its population. Further, these land board records contribute to demographic information that guides urban and rural planning and the delivery of services such as electricity and sewage.

The Batswana state is aware of its need for and has made efforts to create such information systems. Because of its dissatisfaction with existing land records the Government of Botswana contracted Data Infotech of India to create a State Land Information Management System (SLIMS) and a Tribal Land Information Management System (TLIMS). By 2004 SLIMS was being piloted in Gaborone and Lobatse. These are web-enabled, up-to-date, integrated land data banks that will contain information on every parcel of land in Botswana and will be available to various state agencies. According to one of the senior officials in charge of SLIMS, the systems are supposed to achieve a variety of functions. These include helping agencies to allocate and document land and assisting district councils to administer building material loans, collect service levies and taxes. They are also supposed to help the Department of Lands collect transfer duties and revenues on properties leased out by the state. Further, the Estate and Valuation Division will use these systems in their valuation and acquisition of land (Interview 9).

There is clear evidence of the link between land information systems and the expansion of public infrastructure in Botswana. During the February 2004 allocation exercise of the Mahalapye Subordinate Land Boards, applications for the documentation of existing land interests surpassed all other demands made by clients. Board members explained to me that the surge was in response to the new rules of two state agencies. The Botswana Power Corporation and the Department of Water Affairs now required applicants to show proof of land rights to be connected to the electricity and water grids. An official at the Department of Water Affairs explained that the requirements were to avoid situations where the department brought pipes to what was supposed to be the land of an applicant only for another person to tell them to desist from causing a nuisance on their property. The

department also wanted to avoid problems with collecting rates from non-paying applicants who turned out not to be the owners of the properties (Interview 28). Electrification exercises in Tsetsebye and Semolale in Bobirwa similarly drove many people to register their land parcels with the Bobonong Subordinate Land Board (Interview 34). Hernando de Soto rightly points out the usefulness of title registries in reducing the 'risk of theft of [utility] services' and the costs of 'bill collection among people hard to locate'. He goes on to ask: 'On what other basis could they [utility providers] identify subscribers, create utility subscription contracts, establish service connections, and ensure access to parcels and buildings?' (de Soto 2000:59).

The Department of Water Affairs imposed similar requirements to facilitate the construction of a pipe-borne sewage system in Mahalapye under its Major Villages Sanitation Project. The project, which started in 2003, was supposed to lay 46.6 km of major pipes and 286.5 km of tertiary pipes in Mahalapye. The department had to take over and compensate owners of properties under which some pipes were going to pass. But it had problems identifying which people to negotiate with and pay compensation to. Unsurprisingly, there were people eager to receive compensation for properties that they did not own. To forestall the confusion and loss of revenue and time, the department asked all property owners to bring documents proving their land interests from the land boards. It then intended to rely on the records of the land boards to distribute compensation to those affected by the project (Interview 29).

The Contributions of Resistance to Dominating Structures

This study raises the broader theoretical issue of the contribution of subversion and resistance to the creation of dominant structures. Why, out of many developing states facing hostile social forces, do some become stronger and go on to undertake positive social transformation while others become weaker and slide further towards the path of negative social transformation? Exploring this question brings to the fore the role of the goals and capacity of social actors, the goals and character of various state officials and the nature of the area/subject of contention in explaining the impact of successful social resistance on states (Hirschman 1970; Dowding et al. 2000; Jackson 1990).

Such research presents challenges on different levels. Because its dependent variable is counter-intuitive and not widely recognized detailed analysis of multiple societal and state segments over time has to be done to establish the very fact of variation that needs to be explained. Observation from a distance will yield what meets the distant gaze in such situations as in the case of Botswana, where observers only notice the subversion and defeat of the state's project of rationalizing rural land allocation.

The investigation of subversion and illegality against state projects makes this subject matter highly sensitive. Given the severity of possible punishments, it is understandable that people take care to hide their activities. Unearthing these hidden activities calls for the adoption of methods that look below surface phenomena to what Scott has described as 'hidden transcripts', those acts of resistance that the dominated deliberately hide from public view (1990). This requires gaining the trust of actors and developing interpretive schemes that allow one to grasp the deeper import of what on the surface appear to be mundane acts with obvious meanings. Participation in the activities of and multiple semi-structured in-depth interviews with research subjects are invaluable for gaining their trust and understanding their wider worldview, which provide interpretive schemes within which actors' actions can be understood. Archival research can provide valuable historical information against which events can be read and interpreted.

Conclusion

Hostile confrontations in which clients have been able to reappropriate some powers to allocate land from land boards have also ended up benefiting the land boards and the state. This account exposes the extent to which much of the state-in-society literature is underpinned by inattention to the possibility of unintended consequences. The state-in-society literature improves on the earlier view that portrayed all state–society interactions as zero-sum. But its allowance for mutually empowering interactions is built on a view of such instances of mutual empowerment as the effects of deliberate collaboration geared towards the achievement of mutual goals (Kohli and Shue 1994:321; Migdal 1994:24–5; Schneider 1998:49). My analysis demonstrates the need to infuse this literature with a consideration for unintended consequences. State and societal forces might set out to disempower each other. The actions that are meant to disempower might, however, produce the unintended consequence of empowerment. Thus, clients who resent the monopolization of land allocation powers by land boards set out to and have succeeded in taking back some of that power from land boards. But this successful subversion has produced the unintended consequence of strengthening the boards and the state by improving records that they can used to transform society.

This counter-intuitive dynamic hinges on a serious consideration of what Kohli and Shue (1994:294), among others, point out as the multi-segmented and recursive character of state–society interactions. A segment of society might inflict a blow on a segment of the state. But this blow might strengthen another segment of the state in its relations with the same or another segment

of society. In Botswana popular stratagems that seem to undermine the power of the land board to allocate land also improve the state's land information system and so empower the Department of Water Affairs to perform its transformative and administrative tasks. Further, successful efforts by one segment of society to cripple a state agency in an iteration of their interactions might better prepare the same segment of the state for its later interactions with that same facet of society. For instance, a certain Thebogo might fool the land board into legitimizing her land claim and so take back some power over the allocation of land. But once the board legitimizes her claim by documenting it, this provides the board with ammunition that it can use to detect and punish later efforts by that Thebogo to fool the board into documenting further extensions of her boundaries.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2009, pp. 125–145

(ISSN 0850-3907)

Des discours aux pratiques du développement en Afrique : une réflexion sur la problématique du développement local dans le milieu rural Toura (Côte d'Ivoire[1])

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Résumé

Le développement local est la capacité généralisée d'une société à se prendre en charge, ou encore le processus par lequel une population se donne les moyens de mobiliser ses forces productives dans la transformation de son milieu en vue d'améliorer les conditions de vie et le bien-être de ses membres. De ce fait, le discours sur le développement local tente d'épouser une certaine forme d'homogénéité sur les approches épistémologiques, théoriques, méthodologiques et pratiques mais aussi sur les causes, les objectifs et les finalités. Dans la réalité, la pratique du développement local s'avère plus complexe et cet article se propose, suite à des entretiens avec les paysans Toura et les responsables des organisations communautaires et associatives, de faire écho aux expériences de développement local qui ont cours dans le pays Toura. Dans une telle perspective, l'accent est mis sur la réflexion portant sur le développement local, sur une connaissance de la région Toura, sur le contexte socio-économique afin de fixer les conditions d'un véritable développement et de présenter quelques actions de développement susceptibles d'être mises en application et qui s'articulent autour d'un ajustement des normes, des pratiques et des structures traditionnelles au profit de la « modernité ».

Abstract

Local development may be defined as the capacity of a society to deal with current issues at hand. It may also be referred to as the process by which a population acquires the means of mobilizing its productive forces in transform-

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ing its environment in order to improve the living conditions of its constituents. Therefore, as discussions arise on local development, some may find coalescence on the epistemological, theoretical, methodological and practical approaches; as well as a resolve on the causes, objectives and final results. In reality, the practice of local development is much more complex, as this article proposes, following discussions with local citizens, community and associative representatives from the Toura area of the Ivory Coast. The goal is to study the feedback from experiments of local development which are in progress in the region of Toura. Emphasis will then be placed on the thought-process of the local development, the knowledge of the Toura area in general, and the socio-economic contexts in order to improve the conditions of the true development. This will in turn present some strategies to be applied which will be articulated around an accommodation of the standards, practices and structures traditional with the profit of modernization.

Introduction

De nos jours, le slogan « Que les populations se prennent en main » est de plus en plus utilisé aussi bien par les acteurs locaux du développement, par les gouvernements africains que par les organismes internationaux. D'ailleurs, l'étude théorique effectuée par la FAO en 2004 portant sur les approches de développements centrés sur les gens en fait l'élément clé des stratégies futures. Il est porteur d'une nouvelle espérance que les anciens modèles de développement n'ont, hélas, pas pu asseoir après des décennies de pratiques et d'expérimentation un peu partout dans les campagnes et les régions reculées d'Afrique. Aujourd'hui, ce slogan se marie étrangement bien au concept de développement local. Et pourtant, le développement local n'est pas en soi un phénomène nouveau. C'est plutôt, le constat d'échec d'une approche de développement centralisé, de type « *top-down* » et dirigé de l'extérieur (Belloncle 1982 ; Dupriez 1985 ; *Pradervand 1989 ;* Éla 1998 ; Soumahoro 2003) qui a favorisé un regain d'intérêt pour le développement local perçu, aujourd'hui, comme une alternative crédible (Banque Mondiale 1996 ; FAO 2004).

Dès lors, l'intérêt pour le développement local a favorisé la réflexion sur des stratégies de développement qui doivent s'appuyer sur un plus grand engagement des acteurs auxquelles elles se destinent. Toutefois, les enseignements qui se dégagent des faits observés, ici et là, donnent lieu à certaines interrogations. Au-delà du slogan « Que les populations se prennent en main », quelle signification pratique donner à ce genre de discours ? En effet sur quelle population doit s'appuyer cette prise en main ? Comment cette prise en main peut se faire ? Quel est l'apport extérieur dans cette prise en main ? Quels sont les moyens dont disposent les populations pour cette prise en main ? L'environnement social, économique et physique permet-il cette prise en main ?

Du discours sur le développement à sa mise en pratique, les choses ne sont pas aussi simples. En effet, les expériences de développement, un peu partout en Afrique, constituent les preuves évidentes de l'écart qui existe entre les discours et les actions. Dans un tel contexte, poser le problème du développement d'une région est un exercice qui nécessite à la fois une réflexion et une prise de position sur la question même du développement et une connaissance du terrain visé essentielle à une action ajustée à la réalité. Quand un tel exercice doit déboucher sur des recommandations en vue d'une action concrète, la stratégie retenue est sans doute ce qui compte avant tout pour les populations concernées (Bernier 1984 ; Dupriez 1985 ; Olivier de Sardan 1985 ; Ouédraogo 1990 ; Hochet 1995; Soumahoro 2003). Il s'agit là bien sûr d'un volet important de tout projet dont l'objectif est d'induire une dynamique particulière dans une région donnée. Il peut arriver que les liens entre l'action proposée et les démarches théorique et empirique qui la sous-tendent soient flous ou peu convaincants, mais il peut aussi se trouver que ces liens soient transparents et significatifs. Dans ce dernier cas, 1'examen de la stratégie devrait fournir des indications significatives sur le cheminement dont elle n'est que l'aboutissement (Bernier 1984).

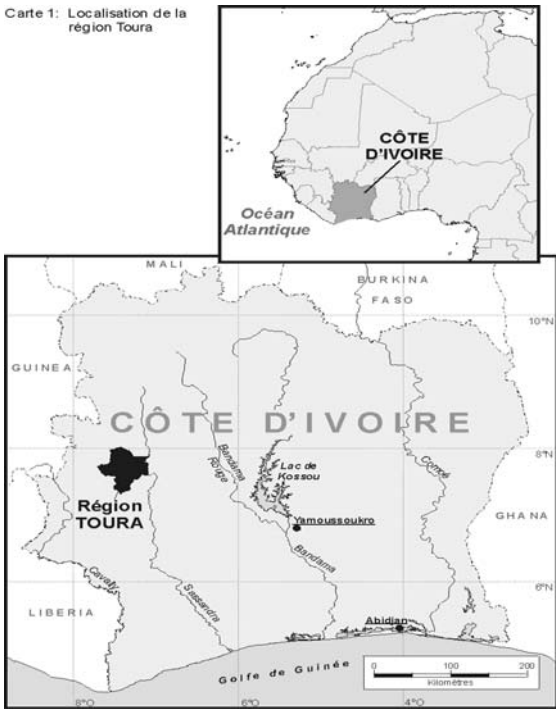
Les enseignements qui se dégagent de certains faits observés dans le milieu rural Toura donnent lieu à des interrogations. Peut-on affirmer, avec certitude, l'existence d'une adéquation entre l'importance qu'occupe le développement local dans les discours et les écrits et ce que révèle l'observation des faits ? C'est pour apporter un début de réponse à cette interrogation que la présente recherche a été entreprise. Elle a pour but de faire écho aux expériences qui se passent dans la région Toura à l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire (cf. carte 1 & carte 2) et par la même occasion contribuer à la réflexion sur le développement et en particulier sur le développement local. Dans une telle perspective, l'accent sera mis sur la question du statut-quo, de la rupture ou de la mutation dans le processus de développement, sur la question de l'autonomie et sur la connaissance du contexte sociopolitique et économique du développement afin de fixer les conditions d'un véritable développement et enfin présenter la stratégie de développement susceptible d'être mise en application.

Une région marginale, un peuple marginal et traditionnel

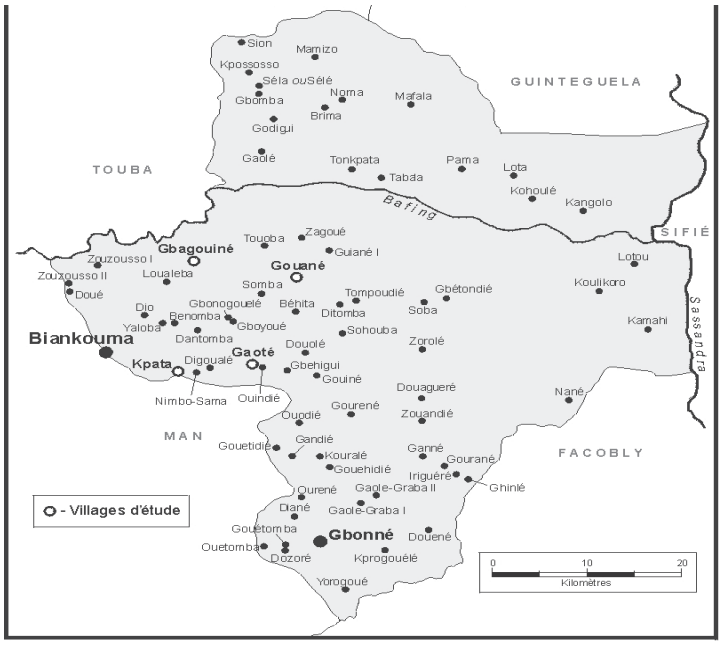
Le peuple Toura appartient au grand groupe mandé qui s'étend de la zone septentrionale sahélienne à la zone méridionale forestière de l'Afrique de l'ouest. Il est assimilé à la composante méridionale du groupe mandé communément appelé mandé sud. Il occupe dans l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire, un territoire dont l'agencement à l'architecture spatiale régionale constitue une particularité qui se traduit par une marginalité territoriale. L'excentricité

du pays Toura constitue un handicap majeur dans l'intégration de l'architecture spatiale nationale. Il est localisé à plus de 600 km des centres nerveux de l'économie et des décisions politiques. Le pays Toura subit l'effet de la distance et est en retrait des grands axes économiques à cause de l'éloignement des pôles urbains importants et de la déficience des infrastructures de communication. Au niveau régional, l'originalité du relief fait de l'espace Toura un espace marginal. Les difficultés de liaison à l'intérieur du territoire en font un territoire peu accessible et l'arrière-pays constitue une vaste région enclavée. Les liaisons inter-villages sont difficiles. Les pistes secondaires sont d'accès difficiles et parfois impraticables. L'espace Toura est faiblement arrimé à l'espace régional.

Carte 1 : Localisation de la région de Toura



Carte 2 : la région Toura



Dans la société Toura, l'individu est un être qui s'accomplit et s'épanouit au travers des balises que la société a fixées. Il évolue dans un cadre familial restreint et étendu au sein duquel il reçoit une éducation et subit les cérémonies initiatiques. La personnalité de l'individu repose sur son éducation en conformité avec les normes sociales et pratiques établies. Le contrôle de l'individu constitue le garant de la cohésion sociale et de la stabilité des institutions traditionnelles. Ce contrôle se traduit par le respect des règles éditées par la société, par le poids qu'exercent les familles, les lignages, les différentes structures sociales.

Le fonctionnement de la famille est hiérarchisé dans la société Toura. Le chef de ménage est responsable d'un noyau familial regroupant sa femme et ses enfants. Le chef de ménage se réfère le plus souvent au chef de famille pour un certain nombre de problèmes à résoudre qui peuvent être liés à son ménage ou qui impliquent le reste de la famille. Il sert de relais entre les chefs de ménage de sa famille et le chef du village.

À l'instar de l'Afrique traditionnelle, l'âge dans la société traditionnelle Toura pose le fondement de l'autorité. La personne âgée a droit au respect et à la considération. De lui-même, l'âge ne donne pas un statut ; mais les relations sociales qui placent les anciens au cœur même de l'organisation et

de la structuration de la vie en société ont entériné dans la pratique une gérontocratie, responsable exclusive de l'ordre social. L'intérêt que la société porte à ses anciens prend parfois l'aspect d'un culte véritable et le pouvoir que cette gérontocratie détient est essentiellement lié à deux réalités : d'une part à leur capacité d'intervention en matière de « sacré » et d'autre part leur rôle de régulateur des alliances matrimoniales et de la vie familiale au quotidien. L'estime que la population porte aux anciens n'est pas un simple sentiment de gérontophilie, mais elle est renforcée par des sentiments de crainte et d'appréhension du sacré qui constitue un pan important de la vision cosmique du Toura.

La société est très hiérarchisée. Les décisions se prennent au sommet et se diffusent à travers les différents maillons de la société jusqu'à la base. Elles sont du ressort des anciens réunis au sein du conseil du village. Si d'une manière générale, les enfants ne subissent que l'autorité parentale, les jeunes et les femmes par contre subissent l'autorité et les décisions des anciens. Les adultes sont assujettis, dans une moindre mesure, à l'autorité des anciens. Ils constituent le plus souvent les courroies de transmission des décisions des anciens. La femme et les jeunes célibataires restent sous une perpétuelle tutelle.

Le poids d'un certain nombre de structures est encore important dans la société. Qu'il s'agisse des structures sociales, du système matrimonial, de la fête d'initiation, des interdits, du pouvoir des anciens et de leur contrôle sur les femmes et sur les jeunes, il faut avoir à l'esprit qu'ils pèsent dans le fonctionnement actuel de la société et lui confèrent une spécificité qui fait de la société Toura une société originale.

L'agriculture Toura évolue sur un mode de production traditionnel. Les techniques et les pratiques agricoles sont encore rudimentaires. Les exigences d'une plus grande production agricole pour améliorer le revenu paysan et satisfaire les nouveaux besoins se heurtent à des pratiques agricoles peu productives. Les difficultés de développement que connaît le pays Toura s'expliquent par la faiblesse de son agriculture mais aussi par les difficultés à intégrer l'agriculture de subsistance dans un circuit commercial viable d'autant plus que les contrecoups de l'agriculture de rente (café-cacao) laisse le paysan Toura totalement dépendant des spéculateurs et d'un État prédateur.

Statu quo, rupture ou mutation dans le processus de développement ?

> Développer sans abîmer.
> Ledéa Ouédraogo 1990.

L'Afrique rurale, à quelques exceptions près, reste encore majoritairement une Afrique des communautés, une Afrique des villages (Belloncle 1982),

encore attachée à des valeurs et pratiques ancestrales (Belloncle 1982 ; Dupriez 1985 ; Éla 1998) de fraternité de travail, d'entraide familiale, de solidarité communautaire, de cohésion villageoises et de destin commun. Dans un tel contexte, le développement des communautés rurales en Afrique et particulièrement celle du pays Toura nécessite-t-il le maintien et le fonctionnement des anciens modes de production et de gestion sociale ou exige-t-il une rupture ou tout au moins une mutation ?

Au niveau académique et théorique, la question n'est pas totalement tranchée. Elle a longuement intéressé les chercheurs et inspiré des stratégies de développement, à première vue, souvent divergentes. En effet, deux écoles de pensée s'opposent. Il y a ceux qui pensent qu'il est possible d'adapter les structures traditionnelles à une vie économique plus moderne (Belloncle 1982 ; Bernier 1984 ; Dupriez 1985 ; Olivier de Sardan 1985 ; Ouédraogo 1990 ; Hochet 1995 ; Soumahoro 2003) et ceux qui pensent que la modernisation implique nécessairement un bouleversement, une dénaturation des structures traditionnelles et donc que ces structures sont des freins à la modernisation tant qu'elles subsistent intactes (Meister 1982 ; Banque Mondiale et FAO). Deux auteurs, par leurs écrits et prises de positions, qui restent d'actualité, illustrent parfaitement cette querelle d'école. Il s'agit d'Albert Meister et de Guy Belloncle. Le premier, dans son ouvrage intitulé : *Participation pour le développement*, fonde sa réflexion et son argumentation sur la disparition des structures traditionnelles villageoises comme condition indispensable au développement des communautés rurales. Le second, dans son ouvrage, *La question paysanne en Afrique noire*, prend position pour le maintien des structures villageoises qu'il considère comme le fondement du développement en milieu rural.

La philosophie « mesterienne » du développement repose sur le principe que l'initiative individuelle est pratiquement impossible dans le cadre d'une société traditionnelle à cause du contrôle social s'exerçant sur chacun des membres du groupe. Le postulat de Meister est assez clair : *le développement ne peut se faire que sur la base des individus*. Dans un tel contexte, quelle alternative peut-il avoir dans une société où la communauté passe avant l'individu ? Pour Meister, rien ne sera possible tant que cette société traditionnelle persistera, et en conséquence est bon tout ce qui contribue à sa déstructuration. Et puisque les sociétés traditionnelles s'opposent à l'émergence d'individus «autonomes», la tâche la plus urgente c'est de les briser. Il faut dans ce cas, selon Meister, « favoriser l'émergence d'entrepreneurs », « encourager le développement de l'esprit des affaires», «mettre en place des procédures de sélection aboutissant au recrutement des plus dynamiques, des plus aguerris, des plus productivistes, de tous ceux

qui ont le goût du profit et de l'enrichissement individuel ». Ce qu'il faut à l'Afrique, c'est un développement «dirigé par les forts, impitoyable, douloureux». C'est « en Afrique qu'il s'agit encore au contraire de créer des inégalités économiques ». Une étape que l'Europe a réussie alors de quel droit l'Afrique prétendrait-elle y échapper ? Cette interrogation de Meister semble être, dans une moindre mesure, aussi celle de Mendras (1991) lorsqu'il dit ceci : «Pour savoir comment faire entrer les paysans du monde entier dans la civilisation industrielle, afin qu'ils puissent se nourrir et prospérer, le meilleur exemple à méditer ne serait-il pas celui des paysans d'Occident qui ont déjà fait le saut ? »

L'approche préconisée par Meister, qui peut paraître excessive, a inspiré de manière explicite ou implicite les politiques de développement en milieu rural de nombreux gouvernements, d'organismes internationaux et des structures d'encadrement et de développement en Afrique au lendemain des indépendances et jusqu'aux années 80. Dans certains pays, les actions gouvernementales ont consisté à saper les bases de l'autorité traditionnelle ou à mettre en place de nouveaux mécanismes de désignation des autorités villageoises en dehors du cadre traditionnel. La « chefferie administrative » d'origine coloniale qui perdure depuis l'indépendance, et qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec les chefferies précoloniales, en est une illustration. Cette situation n'a pas cours dans tous les pays africains, mais les tentatives n'ont pas manqué avec des réussites et des échecs. En Côte d'Ivoire, si la question de l'autorité traditionnelle se pose différemment en fonction des différentes régions du pays, on note cependant une très faible intervention de l'État pour changer la donne traditionnelle. Toutefois, les chefs apparaissent comme les symboles d'une légitimation des valeurs traditionnelles plutôt que comme de véritables partenaires au développement. Ils sont bons à paraître ornés de bijoux et d'autres apparats traditionnels lors de grandes manifestations et de réceptions, ou encore à agir comme auxiliaire de l'administration auprès des populations, mais cela ne fait pas d'eux de vrais partenaires au développement.

Au niveau des organismes d'encadrement et de développement nationaux et internationaux, les discours ont certes progressivement changé pour intégrer la dimension communautaire et participative du développement dans les stratégies, mais, dans la pratique, le degré d'engagement reste encore flou. L'intérêt est toujours porté sur l'initiative individuelle et privée, qui par son dynamisme aura un effet d'entraînement sur le reste de la communauté villageoise et, de ce fait, sur le développement du village. À ce titre, la disparition des structures traditionnelles semble être la seule alternative possible pour un développement des sociétés rurales traditionnelles. Cette position n'est pas partagée par Belloncle (1982) qui pense que non seulement la

disparition des structures traditionnelles n'est pas la seule alternative, mais qu'elle n'est pas la meilleure solution.

Il propose donc le développement par les communautés contrairement à Meister qui milite pour leurs disparitions au profit de l'individu. Face à une telle divergence, quel doit être le fondement du développement en milieu rural ? Le développement doit-il être quelque chose d'individuel tendant à faire disparaître les structures traditionnelles ? Et si oui, faut-il dans ce cas introduire de «force» l'initiative individuelle par la négation des structures traditionnelles comme le préconise Meister et comme cela fut maintes fois tenté ? Contrairement aux idées largement diffusées dans les ouvrages d'histoire, les formes d'organisation socio-économiques récentes en Afrique et en particulier dans le pays Toura se différencient aisément de celle des communautés primitives. Elles reposent sur un dualisme entre l'individu et le collectif constituant ainsi un socle solide. Parmi les atouts, d'un tel dualisme, il faut retenir des structures de décision consensuelle et une grande homogénéité économique se traduisant, en particulier, par 1'egalité d'accès à la terre et la faible différenciation dans l'accès au moyen de production. Selon Belloncle (1982), seule l'appropriation collective du sol et des formes coopératives de travail que l'Afrique doit à son fond coutumier, peuvent expliquer une telle situation. Pourtant, le maintien de tels é1éments n'a pas empêché la campagne africaine d'incorporer des é1éments du système capitaliste introduits par le colonisateur, notamment l'initiative de la production revenant au paysan, la culture individuelle des champs et l'appropriation privée de ses fruits, et 1'écoulement sur un marché d'une partie de la production. En pays Toura, l'adaptation s'est faite parfaitement. L'activité agricole de subsistance s'exerce concomitamment avec l'agriculture de rente (café et cacao). Le paysan Toura est propriétaire de sa plantation de café ou de cacao dont il essaie d'écouler la production pour satisfaire ses besoins et ceux de sa famille et de réaliser ses projets.

Évidemment ces nouveaux é1éments, qui traduisent l'adaptation du traditionnel et du moderne, peuvent devenir des germes de décomposition du fonds coutumier, s'ils ne bénéficient pas à court terme d'un contexte socio-économique dont la cohérence contrôlerait leurs effets différenciateurs. Cette situation permettrait, ainsi, une évolution vers le système auquel tend la société moderne sans passer par la destruction des structures traditionnelles. Face à la capacité d'adaptation de la campagne africaine et des paysans, notre intime conviction est que les structures traditionnelles constituent un atout majeur dans le processus de développement du milieu rural africain et en particulier du milieu rural Toura. Il serait illusoire de souhaiter leur disparition afin que le développement se fasse. Elles font partie de la solution et non du problème.

Il faut nécessairement s'appuyer sur ces structures pour relever les défis du développement. Il suffit dans ce cas de corriger les dysfonctionnements et autres insuffisances des structures traditionnelles ou des pratiques traditionnelles et éviter ainsi de jeter le bébé avec l'eau du bain comme semble le préconiser Meister dans son approche de développement du milieu rural. En conclusion, nous ne sommes pas partisan d'un statut-quo encore moins d'une rupture mais plutôt d'une mutation, d'un processus d'adaptation des structures traditionnelles Toura permettant d'aller vers plus d'autonomie et d'efficacité dans l'action. Les projets initiés depuis les années 90 par les organismes internationaux et surtout les ONG, actives dans les actions de développement local, tentent de favoriser cette approche pragmatique consistant à s'appuyer sur les structures existantes pour incuber le développement. Les études et recherches initiées par certains auteurs (Belloncle 1982 ; Beaudoux 2001 ; Prevost 2001 ; Lévy 2000 ; Éla 1982,1998 ; Aubin 1991 ; Bernier 1984, 1988 ; Dupriez 1985 ; Olivier de Sardan 1985 ; Ouedraogo 1990 ; Hochet 1995 ; Soumahoro 2003) ont souligné la nécessité d'encourager un développement local dans les milieux ruraux africains qui tient compte à la fois des réalités intrinsèques du milieu et les exigences de développement et de renouveau dont sont porteur les politiques initiées par l'État, les organismes internationaux et les ONG.

Autonomie : facteur clé de succès d'un processus de développement au niveau local ?

Aux différentes politiques d'intervention directe dans le milieu rural des États avec des résultats souvent mitigés s'est substituée progressivement une alternative fondée sur l'idée de la satisfaction des besoins élémentaires des individus dans un contexte d'autonomie totale ou partielle. Cette approche envisage le développement comme un processus fondé d'abord sur une mobilisation des ressources naturelles et humaines de chaque région avec comme objectif premier la satisfaction des besoins de base des habitants de la région. À cette fin, les politiques de développement préconisent des stratégies nécessitant une main-d'œuvre importante, mais peu exigeantes en capitaux, applicables à l'échelle locale, fondées sur les ressources régionales et ayant recours à une technologie appropriée. Cette approche a reçu depuis quelques années une bonne dose de support académique et rhétorique, mais elle a rarement inspiré des stratégies de développement (Bernier 1984) des États qui sont restés attachés à une politique d'intervention directe.

L'observation des politiques de développement agricole et du monde rural de l'État de Côte d'Ivoire permet difficilement d'affirmer avec certitude qu'une stratégie axée sur l'idée de la satisfaction des besoins élémentaires des individus dans un contexte d'autonomie totale ou partielle a été menée

dans le pays Toura. Même si, au niveau des programmes de développement sectoriel appuyés par des organismes internationaux comme la Banque Africaine de Développement (BAD), dans le cadre du projet *BAD Ouest*, plusieurs actions initiées laissent entrevoir une telle stratégie dans la région Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire, sa matérialisation sur le territoire Toura reste très limitée. L'existence de quelques structures décentralisées d'encadrement et d'appui aux paysans est très loin de rentrer dans ce schéma stratégique. Le plus souvent, leur mode d'opération s'inscrit beaucoup plus dans une approche d'intervention directe par la réalisation de projets avec une obligation de résultats que dans la recherche d'un développement nécessairement axé sur l'autonomie des partenaires locaux.

Face à cette réalité, notre conception du développement, basée elle aussi sur l'idée de la satisfaction des besoins essentiels, nous a amené à définir le développement comme la capacité généralisée d'une société de se prendre en charge, ou encore comme le processus par lequel une société se donne les moyens de mobiliser ses forces productives dans la transformation de son milieu en vue d'améliorer les conditions de vie et le bien-être de ses membres. Bref, un processus global incluant 1'ensemble des aspects de la vie (environnement, activités de production et d'échanges, comportement de consommation, culture) et impliquant la participation des collectivités locales tout autant à la prise de décision qu'à la réalisation des activités porteuses de progrès. Ainsi envisagé, le développement réside moins dans un résultat atteint que dans un ensemble d'activités réalisées selon les attentes des collectivités concernées, avec leur accord et leur participation.

C'est cette approche du développement qui a guidé notre démarche de recherche dans les quinze villages visités et surtout dans les quatre villages retenus pour l'étude. L'enquête sur le terrain, basée sur les focus groups avec les responsables villageois et les associations villageoises, l'administration de questionnaires à 120 paysans ainsi que l'observation du finage des différents villages, ont permis de se faire une idée de la question du développement au niveau local. L'enquête a permis d'identifier les problèmes et les besoins des populations et aussi d'entrevoir les approches de solutions initiées en fonction des moyens et des possibilités qu'offre le milieu Toura.

Le contexte socio-politique et économique

La région Toura connaît une situation de sous-développement qui n'est, somme toute, pas significative jusqu'à présent. Le caractère marginal du territoire a permis la survivance d'un système de production traditionnel voué à sa propre reproduction. Aussi, sous plusieurs aspects, mode de vie, division du travail, formes de solidarité, rythmes de production, etc., il s'agit davantage de problèmes d'adaptation aux contraintes liées au nouvel

environnement socio-économique introduit par la modernité que d'un véritable sous-développement et une dépendance réelle avec un système économique extérieur. Il s'agit d'une société « secouée », encore fortement marquée par le passé, mais où se manifestent depuis quelques décennies des mutations réelles qui risquent de s'accélérer.

La société Toura est une société en transition, encore dominée par un système gérontocratique plus préoccupé de préserver l'ordre social traditionnel que d'assurer véritablement le développement local. Elle ne peut, non plus, guère compter sur les interventions d'un État ivoirien dont les capacités de financement ont été considérablement réduites. Si la société Toura se doit d'amorcer son propre développement, il lui faut encore s'appuyer en priorité sur des actions communautaires, collectives, car elle n'a pas encore vu l'émergence d'une classe suffisamment importante de paysans innovateurs susceptibles de l'entraîner vers un développement rapide (Soumahoro 2003). Le peuple Toura s'est intégré tardivement à l'économie marchande et à l'ensemble social ivoirien. Cela signifie que tant sur le plan culturel que social, les étapes du développement qui ont marqué l'ensemble de la Côte d'Ivoire au cours des quatre dernières décennies n'ont pas encore été totalement intégrées (Hauhouot 1998 ; Soumahoro 2003). La gérontocratie demeure importante dans la société Toura. L'organisation sociopolitique de la société Toura montre la forte prégnance des structures traditionnelles. Elle souligne la permanence des rapports traditionnels à la terre et des rapports sociaux selon une hiérarchie qui contraint fortement les initiatives individuelles (Holas 1962 ; HCDI-RSMO 1998 ; Soumahoro 2003). Le paysan doit se référer constamment à sa famille, à son groupe familial, à son lignage ou à l'aîné de la famille pour prendre certaine décision qu'il considère vitale pour son avenir et pour les autres membres de sa famille.

Les conditions de production agricole et les conditions de vie demeurent difficiles. L'excentricité de la région au sein du territoire ivoirien, la dispersion et les difficultés d'accessibilité des villages ainsi que le manque de moyens de l'État ont considérablement affaibli les interventions administratives et gouvernementales. Également, la faible implication des structures locales de pouvoir décisionnel dans le processus de développement ne soutient pas une prise en charge endogène du développement agricole et économique. Celui-ci est perçu comme ne pouvant être initié et soutenu que par des interventions extérieures, gouvernementales qui ne se manifestent que marginalement par l'encadrement administratif et technique et par l'implication occasionnelle de rares ONG (Soumahoro 2003). Les acteurs individuels sont rares car le pays Toura n'a pas vu jusqu'à présent l'émergence d'une paysannerie innovatrice et engagée dans la transformation du système de production agricole. L'émergence d'une classe de producteurs résolument engagés dans

l'économie marchande demeure soumise au contrôle social et aux pratiques lignagères et collectivistes (Soumahoro 2003).

Les conditions d'un développement local

Les efforts de développement entrepris, soit par les populations Toura, soit par les structures gouvernementales, impliquent nécessairement une remise en cause de certaines pratiques traditionnelles de la société. Même si l'aspect d'une évolution en autarcie constitue un gage de sécurité contre une transformation radicale dont tous les contours sont difficilement cernés, il est certain qu'à long terme la société Toura devra se transformer. Le degré de transformation dépendra de la manière d'envisager le développement et des alternatives possibles qui s'offrent aux populations en tant qu'acteurs mais aussi bénéficiaires d'un tel processus. Il s'agit pour la population de trouver de nouveaux points d'appui pour assurer sa continuité tout en permettant une mobilisation effective des forces productives dans l'effort de développement local. Par quels moyens assurer ce changement dans la continuité ? Par la réalisation d'un certain nombre de conditions qui, somme toute, dépendent en partie des facteurs sociopolitique et économique internes à la société Toura.

Préserver les acquis essentiels de la culture Toura

Comme toute société confrontée à une influence extérieure, la société Toura peut-elle à la fois s'ouvrir au changement, maintenir sa cohésion et préserver les valeurs propres à sa culture ? À première vue, les conditions d'existence et les circonstances actuelles, sans être des atouts réels, lui sont favorables. La marginalisation territoriale et le peu d'ouverture sur l'extérieur ont permis de préserver encore un socle traditionnel dans le respect des valeurs et principes fondateurs de la société. Toutefois, le danger vient de l'introduction de techniques et surtout de nouvelles connaissances et de la scolarisation qui constituent des canaux parallèles de diffusion du savoir autres que celles des anciens et une menace potentielle de l'autorité traditionnelle. L'émergence des responsables d'associations de développement, généralement scolarisés, dans les villages Toura et jouant un rôle de plus en plus important en est la parfaite illustration. Dans ce cas, comment concilier, des changements qui semblent inévitables et la solidarité sociale, socle de la société Toura ? L'enquête terrain ne permet pas de répondre avec certitude à cette question. Toutefois, tout n'est pas noir ou blanc. On observe des processus d'adaptation, de recherche d'équilibre entre valeur traditionnelle et les réalités modernes. En effet, il ressort des entretiens avec les paysans Toura qu'ils sont conscients de la nécessité de préserver les acquis de la société traditionnelle et de la nécessité de s'ouvrir sur l'extérieur. Il va de soi que le paysan Toura est

flexible et il n'est pas aussi réfractaire au changement. Comme exemple, nous avons l''intégration de la culture de café et cacao (deux cultures de rentes extérieures au milieu Toura) à la culture de subsistance. Ce qui a permis l'acquisition de nouvelles pratiques de travail qui constitue aujourd'hui le socle de l'activité agricole. L'adoption de nouvelles techniques n'est pas rejetée, elle est consentie, même si l'impact d'une telle adoption n'est pas considéré. Cet impact peut être négatif dans la mesure où le milieu social exerce encore un contrôle sur l'individu et l'efficacité de la technique importée peut entraîner un sentiment de défavorisation de la culture pouvant entraîner soit la dépendance ou l'attentisme face à l'aide extérieure. D'où la nécessité d'introduire des changements techniques, à petite dose, et de faire en sorte qu'ils accompagnent les changements sociaux. Ces changements doivent être assumés et mises en place par les communautés. C'est de cette façon qu'un changement souhaité pourra être compris et accepté par tout le monde.

Débarrasser la culture de ses insuffisances

> Il est plus facile de détruire une molécule d'atome que de détruire une coutume. Albert Einstein.

Le discours classique qui consiste à enjoliver les cultures africaines et dans la moindre mesure celle du peuple Toura ne saurait prospérer longuement. S'il est vrai que la culture africaine regorge d'un potentiel (Éla 1998) incroyable, il est aussi vrai que certains aspects en constituent une faiblesse. Le maintien des aspects négatifs de cette culture est incompatible avec le souci de renforcer la responsabilité individuelle et collective dans un processus de développement local. Dans ce contexte, débarrasser la culture de ses insuffisances sonne comme un défi. Toutefois, il serait illusoire de croire à la facilité d'une telle entreprise. En effet, les changements au niveau culturel sont les plus longs et difficiles à réaliser car ils portent le plus souvent, comme c'est le cas en pays Toura, sur des valeurs profondément enracinées dans la mentalité collective. Normes sociales de représentation, elles constituent l'essence même de l'individu, à savoir son identité. Cela est un fait. Toutefois, le nouvel environnement qui s'impose aux acteurs traditionnels, exige des changements au niveau de certains aspects du rapport entre les individus.

Apporter un changement dans le dualisme respect - crainte des anciens
L'élément caractéristique de la société Toura est le respect (Holas 1962 ; Soumahoro 2003) et la peur des anciens (Soumahoro 2003). Des aspects culturels dont font très peu cas les études de développement sur le milieu rural. Il s'agit de phénomènes dont les conséquences sur les paysans ne peuvent être quantifiées. Ces phénomènes ne peuvent, ainsi, se prêter à des analyses statistiques, mais ils demeurent réels. Le paradoxe ici réside dans

l'ambiguïté qu'il y a entre le respect et la crainte des anciens. On ne sait jamais où le respect s'arrête et où commence la crainte. L'interface entre le respect et la crainte reste élastique et source d'ambiguïté entraînant souvent une inaction de la part de certains acteurs. Le problème est de pouvoir faire une dissociation nette entre le respect, qui relève des rapports sociaux, et la crainte qui relève des considérations plutôt magiques généralement associées au maléfique. Le pouvoir magique ou surnaturel, attribué à tort ou à raison aux anciens, biaise considérablement les rapports sociaux et constitue une sorte d'inertie qui freine les initiatives individuelles. La peur d'une malédiction lorsqu'une initiative est prise de manière isolée et sans l'accord ou l'appui d'un ancien a été plusieurs fois soulignée lors de notre séjour dans les villages. À ce niveau, il doit s'opérer un changement susceptible de libérer les énergies des individus et favoriser le goût de l'action. Nous n'avons pas de solutions à proposer quant à la forme ou au mécanisme qui peut amener ce changement, mais il constitue, au regard de la situation observée sur le terrain, une condition essentielle pour que le développement soit une réalité.

Favoriser un changement dans la rigidité des rapports entre catégories sociales

Les relations entre les catégories sociales (anciens, jeunes, hommes, et femmes) sont marquées par une rigidité qui laisse très peu de place à un partenariat entre elles dans des activités de développement. Les interfaces d'activité et d'action de développement sont souvent très limitées. La division sociale du travail reste prégnante. Cette division, loin d'être une mauvaise chose en soi, pêche, cependant, par une absence de souplesse qui ne permet pas de jeter un pont et renforcer ainsi l'esprit d'équipe qu'exige une action de développement communautaire. Tout se passe comme si dans l'esprit du villageois Toura les catégories sociales étaient des compartiments étanches ayant des tâches et des fonctions spécifiques. Les propos du genre : « C'est une affaire de femme…, c'est une affaire d'homme…, c'est une affaire des anciens ou des jeunes » lorsqu'il s'agissait de réaliser une activité spécifique que nous avons entendu, lors de l'enquête terrain, sont assez évocateurs de la rigidité des rapports entre les différentes catégories sociales. Cette rigidité est de nature à confiner une catégorie sociale dans des rôles spécifiques mais surtout, et c'est le plus important, à nier volontairement ou involontairement sa capacité d'investir d'autres champs d'action et de compétence. Celle-ci laisse peu de place à l'émergence d'autres valeurs et favorise très peu la dynamique sociale. Il s'agit de rompre avec cette rigidité des rapports entre les différentes catégories sociales afin de créer une dynamique globale qui peut faire appel à toutes les compétences sans exclusivité dans le processus de développement.

Rompre avec la peur de l'échec et de la réprobation collective

La peur de l'échec et de la réprobation collective constitue des valeurs sociales et culturelles de la plupart des paysans Toura. La routine et le statu quo sont, en effet, les fruits de l'ordre social immuable et de son respect par tous. Un processus de passivité sociale s'installe et se traduit non seulement par une absence d'entrepreneuriat, mais aussi par la peur de l'échec et de la réaction du reste de la communauté villageoise. Une tentative effectuée par un paysan est vue par le reste de la communauté comme un défi à l'ordre établi, à tel point que le téméraire finit par désarmer, aidé en cela par les pressions qui ne manquent pas de s'abattre sur lui. La réprobation collective ne se fait, certes, plus de manière frontale, mais sous d'autres formes plus insidieuses comme des conseils répétés, avec arguments à l'appui pour dissuader le paysan d'aller plus loin, soit par des actes de magie ou de sorcellerie, soit par une mise en quarantaine partielle. Le résultat escompté est, certes, le maintien du statu quo, mais aussi un rééquilibrage constant de la structure sociale et un nivelage social pour éviter une émergence marquée d'acteurs susceptibles de bousculer l'ordre établi. La réprobation collective nuit considérablement à l'initiative individuelle et freine l'émergence de paysans innovateurs. Pour que le paysan prenne des initiatives au niveau individuel et qu'il ait le goût du risque, il faudra considérablement atténuer cette pratique.

Participation de tous aux changements

En dépit des insuffisances soulignées ci-dessus, les conditions d'un développement commandent d'établir une relation de confiance et de compréhension entre les collectivités locales et les intervenants extérieurs. Cette relation doit amener à long terme à une participation de tous aux changements voulus par l'ensemble de la communauté et ce, à plusieurs niveaux d'intervention possible.

La participation des acteurs locaux aux changements exige une participation effective à la prise de décision. Si cet aspect constitue, déjà, une étape importante, il demeure insuffisant. Ce qui est le plus important est que les acteurs aient les moyens de rendre concrets les décisions et les besoins qu'ils ont définis. Les acteurs en ont-ils les moyens et les capacités ? Pour cela, il faut que le paysan soit moins dépendant de l'extérieur dans la réalisation des projets, c'est-à-dire qu'il soit autonome. Toutefois, l'autonomie n'a de substance que par rapport à la capacité des individus et des collectivités à générer de la richesse. Cette dimension essentielle paraît au regard du potentielle socio-économique du pays Toura réalisable avec un minimum d'organisation des acteurs et un certain appui extérieur.

Les paysans et les associations villageoises, au-delà des contraintes d'autonomie, doivent renforcer leurs capacités d'entreprendre pour être plus

aptes à s'impliquer dans les actions de développement. La valorisation de l'entrepreneuriat villageois doit déboucher sur une relative autonomie financière. Cette approche préconisée ne signifie en aucune manière que l'entrepreneuriat n'existe pas dans la société Toura. Mais, face aux nouveaux défis auxquels les paysans et les associations sont confrontés, il importe pour eux d'apporter des changements à leurs manières d'entreprendre, de devenir plus agressifs, de prendre plus d'initiatives et surtout plus de risques. La prise du risque n'étant pas une habitude paysanne, elle l'est encore moins pour les associations villageoises. Lorsque la certitude et la sécurité d'un acte ne sont pas totalement garanties, le paysan hésite à s'engager. Or le goût du risque est considéré comme l'une des qualités nécessaires à l'entrepreneuriat. Cette qualité n'est pas suffisamment développée tant au niveau individuel qu'au niveau communautaire et collectif. Cette insuffisance explique en partie la faiblesse des actions de développement et le très faible degré de participation.

La participation au développement exige, en même temps, le maintien de la cohésion sociale, une libération des principales forces productives, les jeunes et les femmes, et l'aménagement de nouveaux rapports économiques de ces groupes avec le reste de la collectivité. Il faudra donc s'assurer qu'une initiative locale dans un cadre non-traditionnel, par exemple, un regroupement de jeunes producteurs, obtienne l'assentiment du conseil du village et qu'elle s'exerce en complémentarité des activités traditionnelles et que les retombées d'une telle activité soient clairement perçues par l'ensemble des villageois.

Les stratégies de développement local

> La marmite commence à bouillir par le bas (le fond).
> Proverbe Toura

L'élément clé de la stratégie doit être une prise en main effective du développement par les collectivités locales. Au regard de la situation globale du pays Toura, des données sociologiques, écologiques et économiques, il importe de consacrer les efforts de développement sur les besoins internes. L'alternative proposée consiste plutôt à développer la capacité de production dans le but de répondre aux besoins réels de consommation, d'améliorer la qualité de vie et de contribuer au développement régional et ce, grâce entre autres à la vulgarisation de techniques de production plus efficaces, l'organisation de services d'appui à la production agricole et 1'expérimentation de modes de participation autonome des populations locales et de groupes de producteurs innovateurs. Bref, une option qui tient compte des activités, des attitudes et des aspirations de la population régionale et qui veut préserver et

accroître la capacité d'initiative, de façon à assurer que le développement soit, comme il se doit, le produit d'une participation active et consentie.

Les changements majeurs qui peuvent s'opérer au niveau de la production agricole ou de la diversification des activités doivent, selon nous, passer par la consolidation des activités existantes. Il faudra promouvoir la production agricole de subsistance afin que l'état d'autosuffisance alimentaire que connaît la région demeure et qu'ensuite cette agriculture de subsistance puisse être un appoint à l'agriculture de rente.

Il est de notoriété que l'intervention extérieure a été relativement limitée en pays Toura. Dans ce cas, l'apport extérieur, en tenant compte du niveau actuel de développement, doit s'appuyer sur des technologies appropriées, d'apprentissage simple et de vulgarisation accessible à la grande majorité de personnes. L'objectif à court terme étant une certaine autonomie et flexibilité des acteurs locaux à s'approprier facilement ces technologies, susceptibles d'éviter des coûts excessifs d'apport extérieur en entretien et réparation. Cette approche aura l'avantage de concilier un savoir extérieur moderne avec un savoir faire local offrant moins de contrainte aux acteurs locaux.

Afin d'assurer une meilleure intégration à la réalité sociale et culturelle de la région, le rythme d'intervention devrait s'articuler autour d'un calendrier : 1. d'activités réalisables immédiatement par les villageois sans nécessairement avoir besoin d'appui extérieur. Ce sont généralement des actions simples et peu coûteuses (structure de coordination des associations villageoises, appui à l'action féminine, mise en place d'une comptabilité souple, etc.) 2. d'activités réalisables à court terme par les villageois eux-mêmes ou avec un minimum d'appui extérieur. Ce sont généralement des actions simples et qui demandent peu de moyens venant de l'extérieur (caisse d'épargne et de crédit, développer les cultures maraîchères etc.) 3. d'activités réalisables à moyen terme impliquant aussi bien les acteurs locaux que les acteurs externes. À ce stade, le rôle des acteurs externes dans le soutien aux initiatives locales est important. Il porterait sur l'encadrement et la formation et sur l'appui logistique, humain et budgétaire. 4. d'activités réalisables à long terme. Elles se présentent comme une suite logique des actions antérieures ou du moins leurs conséquences. Elles sont initiées autant par les acteurs locaux que par les acteurs externes (plan directeur du village, intégration des jeunes et femmes au sein du conseil du village etc.).

L'échec ou le succès d'une stratégie de développement dépend énormément de la mobilisation des personnes engagées dans le processus et de leur apport. Ici, il s'agit des paysans Toura. Leur évaluation des besoins est généralement économique, c'est-à-dire qu'avant tout, l'enjeu réside dans la satisfaction des besoins de subsistance. Si la possibilité qu'ils soient associés à une prise de décision est réelle, ils auront la possibilité d'éliminer eux-

mêmes les obstacles culturels ou sociaux que peut représenter l'introduction de techniques, de matériaux ou de pratiques jugées non conformes aux normes sociales.

Le conseil du village, organe de régulation de la vie sociale au sein de laquelle siège les chefs de famille, a un rôle essentiel à jouer dans le processus de développement. L'appropriation collective et pleine d'une activité ou d'un projet découle de son implication effective et de sa flexibilité à faire accepter aux autres membres de la communauté, si cela est nécessaire, des changements dans les pratiques et lois traditionnelles.

Les producteurs « modernes » constituent dans les villages, au même titre que les cadres en ville, des acteurs nouveaux sur la scène du développement. Leurs activités et surtout leur capacité à s'adapter et à essayer de nouvelles choses font d'eux les possibles catalyseurs du changement dans le milieu local.

Conclusion

Que devrions-nous retenir de tout ceci ? Une seule chose qui nous paraît essentielle à savoir que la rhétorique qui sous-tend le slogan «*Que les populations se prennent en main* » bute le plus souvent sur des réalités plus complexes. En effet, concevoir le développement n'est pas chose aisée, encore moins lorsqu'il s'agit de concevoir le développement des autres à leur place sans nécessairement les associer comme cela a été longuement pratiqué dans le milieu rural africain. Un tel dessein serait en lui-même contradictoire. Le développement ou encore l'évolution autonome à travers un processus de développement endogène et local d'une société, ne relève pas de la planification ou de l'ingénierie, mais procède d'un projet social réalisé selon les attentes des collectivités concernées, avec leur accord et leur participation active. Il comporte fatalement une finalité et en cela il est intimement lié à la société qui l'incarne.

Que retenir de la société Toura ? Qu'elle est dans une phase de mutation toujours marquée par un socle traditionnel très fort symbolisé par le conseil du village. Les signes de fléchissement font apparaître progressivement une tendance à l'intégration de l'apport extérieur dans les pratiques et modes de gestion socio-économique. Les associations de développement constituent l'épicentre de la transformation sociale de l'individu et le fondement des initiatives de développement. Toutefois ces associations se heurtent encore aux structures traditionnelles que des années de modernisation ne suffiront pas à faire disparaître facilement.

Tout compte fait, les nouveaux besoins et aspirations nés d'un modèle de développement imposé sont toujours d'actualité car ils n'ont pas été satisfaits. Les indices d'un sous-développement rural sont présents. En effet, le

processus de modernisation certes embryonnaire n'a pas encore atteint toutes les localités. L'émergence des acteurs et paysans modernes reste encore fragmentaire et la volonté de développement n'est pas non plus affichée avec détermination par tous les acteurs.

Le développement n'étant pas une affaire d'expert, telle est notre intime conviction, il faut voir dans les conditions et les stratégies de développement évoquées plus haut, non pas une recette de développement prête à être exécutée, mais des grandes pistes d'action susceptibles de créer les conditions d'un développement véritable, donc autonome et en conformité avec les aspirations des populations.

Notes

1. La recherche terrain dans le cadre de cette étude a été faite en 2001 avant le déclenchement en 2002 du conflit armé que connaît actuellement la Côte d'Ivoire. L'analyse qui est faite dans cette étude tient donc compte du contexte antérieur à la crise même s'il convient d'admettre que la situation actuelle de crise que vit la Côte d'Ivoire et surtout la région Ouest renforce encore plus la nécessité de prendre en compte l'approche préconisée dans cet article et que la problématique posée est plus que jamais d'actualité.

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