

The Politics of 'Hope' and 'Despair': Generational Dimensions to Igbo Nationalism in Post-Civil War Nigeria

Godwin Onuoha

Princeton Institute for International and Religious Studies (PIIRS)

Princeton University

Email: godwin.onuoha@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper examines the concept of "generations" as one of the key features of contemporary Igbo nationalism, and as one that has received relatively less or no attention in the literature on post-civil war Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. Drawing on the activities of Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo- the apex socio-political group in Igboland- and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) - a second-generation Igbo nationalist movement- this article examines the dynamics of generational tensions between youth-led and elite-led Igbo groups in Igboland. On the one hand, the political agency of Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo is traced genealogically to the imperatives of the patrimonial politics of the Nigerian state, the need to play the "politics of the centre" and re-integrate the Igbo into mainstream politics in the post-civil war era. On the other hand, the MASSOB project is rooted in the aborted secessionist war for Igbo self-determination between 1967 and 1970. It rejects a state-led process, seeks the realignment of the generational balance of power, and ultimately, an exit of the Igbo ethnic group into an alternative political and administrative arrangement. These generational differences and tensions offer insights into the transformation of local politics and the changing configurations of power and authority in present day Igboland, one that pits an emergent youth movement against an enduring Igbo establishment within the broader context of ethnic identity politics in Nigeria.

Key Words: Nationalism, Igbo, War, patrimonial politics, Biafra, Nigeria, Generational differences

Résumé:

Cet article examine le concept de «générations» comme l'une des principales caractéristiques du nationalisme contemporain Igbo, et que celui qui a reçu relativement peu ou pas d'attention dans la littérature est l'après-guerre civile Igbo nationalisme au Nigeria. S'appuyant sur les activités de Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo- le groupe socio-politique sommet dans Igboland- et le Mouvement pour la réalisation de l'État souverain du Biafra (MASSOB) - une deuxième

génération du mouvement nationaliste Igbo, cet article examine la dynamique des tensions générationnelles entre les groupes Igbo dirigés par des jeunes et de l'élite dirigée dans Igbo. D'une part, l'agence politique de Obanaeze Ndi Igbo est tracée généalogique aux impératifs de la politique patrimoniale de l'Etat nigérian, le besoin de jouer la «politique du centre» et ré-intégrer les Igbo dans les grands courants politiques dans le post-tant civil époque de la guerre. D'autre part, le projet MASSOB est enracinée dans la Guerre de sécession avortée pour Igbo autodétermination entre 1967 et 1970 Il rejette un processus dirigé par l'État, vise la réorganisation de l'équilibre des générations du pouvoir, et, finalement, une sortie de l'ethnie Igbo dans un arrangement politique et administrative de remplacement. Ces différences générationnelles des tensions et offrir un aperçu de la transformation de la politique locale et l'évolution des configurations de pouvoir et d'autorité dans nos jours Igbo, qui oppose un mouvement de jeunesse émergente contre un établissement durable Igbo dans le contexte plus large de la politique de l'identité ethnique au Nigeria.

Mots clés: *nationalisme, Igbo, la guerre, la politique patrimoniale, Biafra, au Nigeria, les différences entre générations*

Introduction

One of the defining features of post-civil war Igbo nationalism is the prevalence of inter-generational struggles between youth-led and elite-led Igbo groups in Igboland. These struggles depict contending generational relations and are expressed in the social and political identities of each group. Given the unique situation of the Igbo after the Nigeria-Biafra war in 1970, and as a result of the changing configurations of power in present day Igboland, generational identities have become critical to the balance of power. Mobilizations and differences along generational lines remain a key marker of these identities, as the young(er) generation is perceived as the 'vanguard' generation while the old(er) generation is perceived as a 'client' generation. Yet, the concept of *generation* remain one of the least acknowledged or interrogated in the study of contemporary Igbo nationalism, as none of what has recently emerged as the major works on the Igbo especially since the post-civil war era consider the concept important enough to be a tool for analysis. The significance of this concept inheres in the insights it offers in understanding the emergence of radical youth movements like the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) who are currently upturning, recreating and challenging certain traditional norms of power and authority which are vested in elite-led Igbo organizations like the *Obanaeze Ndi Igbo*¹. This in itself feeds into the broader Nigerian context where youth-based groups, youth revolt and agitations currently play a critical role in Nigeria's uncertain political process since the return to civilian rule in 1999, with far-reaching implications for the state, and its client elites who wield power and authority in different sections of the country.

The fact that youths are currently defying the traditional elders and their conservative agenda is reflective of the highly strained intergenerational relations between the young(er) and the old(er) generation leading to the transformation of the principle of authority, power and duty. While the old(er) generation seek to continuously hold on to their authority, power and status, the young(er) generation are radically redefining the status quo and exploiting the democratic conditions for potential gains. The young(er) generation align with ethnic militia groups and crime syndicates within the expanded 'democratic' space, one that is emerging as a reaction to the allegedly corrupt old(er) generation that wields authority and power. These tendencies reflect the continued (mis) management of the national question, but have now been linked to the broad current of claims, entitlements and the opening up of the democratic space which became very pronounced since Nigeria's return to democracy on 29 May 1999 (Akinyele 2001: 264-5; Nolte 2004: 61; Adebaniwi 2004; Agbu 2004).

Clearly, since 1999, MASSOB and *Ohanaeze* have undoubtedly undergone several transformations. While the former defines itself as a post-civil war second-generation nationalist movement that contests the marginalization of the Igbo since the end of the civil war in 1970, the latter defines itself as the pan-Igbo socio-cultural organization that represents the views of Igbo elites, governors of the five Igbo states and their coterie. Perhaps, the most telling aspect of these transformations is how these organizations have come to define themselves in opposition to each other, and as viable alternatives to each other in Igboland. In reality what has emerged in this phase of Igbo nationalism is a consequence of the intrusion of Igbo national aspirations for power and influence into the local balance of power in Igboland. At the risk of producing an ahistorical analysis, most studies on MASSOB tend to focus on youth as the sole object of investigation. What is critical is a rehistoricization of the MASSOB phenomenon as representing an extreme version of Igbo nationalism that co-exists with earlier and more "moderate" versions of Igbo nationalism in the current context. Inherent in contemporary Igbo nationalism are strains of contradictions and divisions, between (and within) popular/youth versus elite/elder positions, radical versus conservative, as well as, generational differences. This complexity renders the adoption of a binary logic that articulates the issue as one that primarily pits the centralist tendencies of the Nigerian state against the separatist inclinations of MASSOB to be of limited value. Rather, what is more appropriate is to glean the dynamics of the interplay of forces across class and inter-generational lines as the ascendancy of youth-based, radical, grassroots and popular forces and pressures from below, confront the elite-led, conservative and reactionary forces from above in the quest for Igbo self-determination in Nigeria.

Drawing on primary and secondary data, formal and informal interviews and interactions with some key actors, the central objective of this paper is to explore the ramifications of the involvement of popular/youth versus elite/elder positions in contemporary Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. In its current form, contemporary struggles

for Igbo self-determination has assumed a complex dimension, and has spawned new trends and contradictions which are yet to be addressed in the literature on Igbo nationalism. Essentially, it hinges upon elite-led Igbo groups like *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* (the apex Igbo organization) who are perceived to be uninspiring and unattractive to produce any change on one hand, and MASSOB as a grassroots based movement with a radical and timely philosophical anchorage and inspiration on the other hand. The former propagates an elitist, more moderate, less ideological brand of Igbo nationalism, while the latter positions itself as a movement that provides an alternative for disgruntled Igbo youths and the Igbo majority at the grassroots level. The analysis transcends the dominant discourse which attempts to criminalize MASSOB and its activities, and justify Igbo elite positions. Rather, it depicts MASSOB as a second-generation nationalist movement seeking to transform the inequitable post-civil war power relations between the Igbo ethnic group and the Nigerian state aided by its client elites in Igboland, and regain and reassert its position as the only viable alternative to the realization of Igbo self-determination in Nigeria. On this basis, it is important to note that the identity and consciousness of MASSOB vis-à-vis that of the Igbo elites is propelled by specific historical experiences and differing positions regarding the past and the present. With specific reference to MASSOB and *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*, it is possible to discern complex interactions, forces and interests at play in a moderate Igbo elite group and political class as represented by *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*, and grassroots opposition and youth ascendancy as encapsulated in MASSOB.

Conceptual Issues: Youth and Generational Categorizations

The conceptual issues delve into the conceptualization of youth and generational issues on the one hand, and the linkages between inter-generational groups, positions and perspectives on the other hand. Generational preference, interests and perceptions are not viewed as purely inherent and intrinsic qualities of generations; rather they are viewed in conjunction with their broader social political and economic contexts. It is this relationship that helps us understand the ways in which traditional norms of power and authority are created, (re)created and upturned across historical periods in a specific context.

The proper conceptualization and definition of youth and generational issues is ultimately cultural, differs based on history and context, and is constantly shifting (Hansen et al 2008: 7), Definitions of youth is also influenced and shaped by the politics of time and place, and by who defines them (Hall and Montgomery 2000). The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child pegs the upper limit of childhood at age 18, and adopts the notion of youth to capture those between the range of 18 and 24 years, while the Commonwealth puts the upper limit at 29 years (Cited in Hansen 2008: 7; Obi 2006: 6). National legislation in some countries consider 18 years as the

commencement of the era of youth, while in other countries people in their late 30s and sometimes 40s are still considered as youths. Irrespective of context, youth as a concept, assumes meaning culturally and relationally, rather than chronologically (Hansen 2008: 8). Culturally children are distinguished from youth by their dependence (Hansen 2008: 8), while relationally, the term youth represents a social shifter in relation to others, and in space (Durham 2000: 116-117). As Durham (2004: 593) argues elsewhere,

“studies of youth must examine not only their experiences ... and their reactions to, and agency within a larger society, but also the political and pragmatic processes through which certain people can make claims to being youth or try to designate others as youth, for the very category itself is also under reconstruction in the context of such processes”

The analytical turn Gore and Pratten (2003: 216) adopts refer to youth as being defined “irrespective of actual age, through economic and social circumstance and little prospect for future advancement”. This analysis conceptualizes youth as being a very critical component of society and at the very centre of societal interactions and transformations. Youth as a social and demographic category is “characterized by considerable tensions and conflicts generated by the process of social and physical maturation and in the adjustment to social realities” (Osaghae et al 2007: 3). This lends credence to Wyn and White’s (1997: 25, cited in Obi 2006: 7) view on the importance of “rethinking youth” in “relational” rather than in terms of age, by focusing on “the ways young people are constructed through social institutions, and the ways in which they negotiate their transitions”. Youth then is constructed by social, political, economic and cultural specificities, and is not defined solely by age or the experience of being young alone (Obi 2006: 7).

In essence, youths are locked in a struggle for survival, identity and inclusion, these struggles shape how they “as a social group respond to, or more broadly relate to state and society in terms of engagement or disengagement, incorporation or alienation, rapprochement or resistance, integration or deviance” (Ikelegbe 2006: 88). As a critical constituency in society, youth shape structures, norms, rituals, and directions of society while also being shaped by them (Osaghae et al 2007: 3). Through inventive forms of self-realization and an ingenious politics of identity they create and recreate themselves (De Boeck 1999), and they shape society by acting as a political force and source of resistance and resilience (Honwana and De Boeck 2005). Therefore, as Osaghae et al (2007: 3) argue, “youth is a tension-filled, highly unstable category whose management is of crucial importance for societal stability and development as it is a zone of restlessness, anxiety and chaos for the youth and society”. This explains the articulation of youth culture as predominantly negative, and its association with “socio-environmental factors

like urban congestion, polygamy, disease, environmental stress and superficial religion which all lead to a creation of a new barbarism of crime and violence” (Kaplan 1994).

From a Nigerian perspective, the very definition of youth appears to be very flexible, susceptible and accommodates several categories of people. Nigeria’s National Youth Development Policy (National Youth Policy 2001: 3) defines the term “youth” as young persons between the ages of 18 and 35 who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This definition of youth is linked to objective conditions and realities, especially historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues prevalent in Nigeria (National Youth Policy 2001: 3). This explains the adoption of different criteria in the definition of the term. Being a youth in Nigeria often translates into being the most active, most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population socio-economically, emotionally and in other respects. The vulnerability of youth in Africa is captured in popular and academic literature, as “a social category in crisis, excluded, marginalized, threatened, victimized, abused and consequently angry, bitter, frustrated, desperate and violent”. The popular perception is that it is such alienated youths that drift into violence as they respond to alienation by “becoming uncontrollably aggressive and violent ... establishing societies, frightening the middle classes and reinforcing, if not justifying dictatorships” (El-Kenz, 1996, cited in Osaghae et al 2007: 4).

It is possible to see these tendencies about youths repeatedly finding expression in their status and location in the larger crisis of citizenship and state legitimacy in Nigeria. When it comes to mobilizing against the federal government either on issues of resource control in the Niger Delta, or when ethnic militias from different sections of the country mobilize against the state, or in situations when ethno-nationalist groups agitate for self-determination, it is the youth that are at the centre of these struggles. Broadly speaking, the struggle against the state by different constituencies is largely defined by a kind of politics that centers on youth. Participation in the struggle is undertaken either as a youth; if not a youth, an ally of the youth; or as an enemy of the youths and an ally of the state. This does not discount other forms of youth engagements, but the critical issue here is that youth is at the forefront of new forms of political participation and authority that either excludes or includes youth in novel ways, and the issues emanating from these new forms constitutes an important dimension of change which addresses the core of the political system, and include issues like the crisis of citizenship, state legitimacy, politics of representation, and the enduring need to resolve the national question in Nigeria (Durham 2000: 114; Olukoshi 2005: 5).

Inter-Generational Relations: Between the Young(er) and the Old(er)

Alber et al (2008: 1-3) argue that the term “generation” has a “passive” and “active” voice. While the first conceptualizes generation as a category of people who belong to a certain period of time, social category, or position in descent line with specific rules and conventions; the second conceives generation in an active manner that generates creativity and agency, where people are not condemned to their cultural or societal positions, but are able to deploy their position to bring about new ideas and practices, and pursue their own interests within the historical circumstances in which they find themselves. Inter-generational relations are a key component of social change in Africa. The idea of generation was systematically conceptualized by Karl Mannheim (1952 [1927]) in his seminal essay, titled: “The Problem of Generations”. Mannheim’s concept of generation has been drawn upon by contemporary scholars to illuminate and analyze the historical circumstances and challenges of youth in contemporary Africa (Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Cole 2004; Vigh 2006). Some have focused on different aspects of these historical conditions which range from economic generations (Roth 2008), historical generations (Kertzer 1983), to political generations (Le Meur 2008; and Bellagamba 2008; Braumgart and Braumgart 1986: 217). However, it is apparent that generational relations conjures historical experiences and differing positions regarding the past and the present, without which changes in time, space and society cannot be adequately understood. As Obi (2006: 4) points out, generations are thus seen as “bearers of time” and “change”. When the relations between generations are placed in a national context they unveil the contradiction in the multiple forms of Igbo engagement with the Nigerian state, and the ways in which the flow of national resources and patronage from the centre distorts the basis for a viable platform in the articulation of a coherent Igbo agenda.

The relationship between youths and the elderly are sometimes conceptualized in terms of “struggle”, where youths see the older generation as symbols of oppression and injustice, or as those who have been co-opted by the hegemonic powers. Youth are subordinated to the power structures imposed upon them and controlled by the elites and elders in society to foster stability, cohesion and continuity, a situation which becomes apparent when projecting youth as symbols of future power, and relegating the elders as myth and history (Obi 2006: 5). This understanding places youth in a position where they seek to interrogate the prevailing or existing power relations in society, and reinforces their futuristic role as leaders of society, leaders of tomorrow or the successor generation (Mohiddin 2007: 27-33). Conflicts over control and authority are thus embedded in intergenerational relationships and are played out in a cycle of power relations. While the young(er) generation agitates for change and greater authority, the old(er) generation remains ultimately committed to retaining the prevailing power structures and status quo in society. Tensions between the young(er) and old(er)

generation has a unique character in certain contexts as these do not come across as tightly-knit homogenous categories, but harbor tendencies and elements of each other within the broader context of generational power in a specific national political context. This raises an interesting question, one which informs the analysis of inter-generational politics, and its impact on political relations and outcomes in a specific context.

Generations are crucial to the “making” and “remaking” of political, social and economic orders. The very idea of generations, in Le Meur’s (2008: 209) view, immediately suggests a sense of cyclical and sequential continuity, and provides the latitude for contention, rupture and change, and assumes the form of a distorted cycle with the potential for change through its interplay with broader contexts and specific events. The activities of the young(er) generation are always seen as attempting to supplant the old(er) generation, and provide ways in which marginalized young people can articulate their grievances and push for a project of “change” against the prevailing power configurations. The obvious position of youth, the gap between their aspirations and the reality is brought to the fore and is explicitly directed at the generational power hierarchy perceived to be responsible for their subordinate position in national politics. This makes the composition and constitution of the political sphere, and how it is being contested and reformulated critical to understanding the significance of this divide. This study links the emergence of youth agency in MASSOB to a group of disgruntled young Igbo who have mobilized arguments and resources to address the situation of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, and invariably question the relations of old(er) generations of Igbo and Igbo elites with the Nigerian state in a manner that is poised to dislodge the status quo. The ways in which generations subvert one another in the quest for survival and power may currently be playing out. But more importantly, it is the tendency for inter-generational secession and a radical social and political transformation that is at stake. In this connection, the concept of generation structures the analysis and unveils how the past is understood by the old(er) generation and how the future is envisioned and articulated by the young(er) generation. In other words, both are positioned as differently situated categories of subjects in specific and distinct historical categories. This paper uses the concept of generation in a relational sense to show that while the old(er) and young(er) exists, emphasis must be placed on the processes that produce and connect both categories as conflicting social categories in a specific historical context.

Based on formal and informal interactions in the field, the idea of youth and “who a youth is or not” has manifested itself in different ways and under different guises. This localized diversity is not specific to the Nigerian context as the idea of youth in Africa is flexible enough to accommodate all those younger than the elders. This is sufficiently echoed in Obi’s (2006: 7) observations that in Nigeria, “it is even possible to see instances of some individuals who vary their ‘elderhood’ and ‘youthood’ depending on expedient calculations of benefits and risks”. Given the peculiarities of the Igbo culture and tradition, being a youth in Igboland more often than not inheres in age

and status. Traditional Igbo communities are segmented and divided into different age-grades, men's societies, women's societies, and other prestige title societies. The complex nature of these groups precludes the concentration of power and authority in any single group, and the republican nature of most Igbo societies means that recognition, respect and upward mobility are not only accorded on the basis of age but also through achievements in society. Embedded in Igbo culture is the idea that change in society can stem from the transformation of the local arena in a manner that provide young(er) groups the opportunity to ascend the ladder and takeover the roles and duties of old(er) grades. Inter-generational local dynamics in Igboland are linked to broader changes in society, and is grounded or fuelled by specific decisive events. Therefore, in a culture that is largely characterised by dispersed authority, absence of any seat of executive authority, and an enduring republican temperament and tendencies from its earliest times, the ascendancy of "youth power" encapsulated in the activities of MASSOB does not merely interrogate the authority, power and control of *Obanaeze Ndi Igbo*, but it feeds into the existing revolutionary tendencies and pressures from below which has come to represent the contemporary phase of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. There is empirical evidence to confirm that when it comes to grassroots mobilization against the state and its client groups in Igboland, there are elders age-wise, who consider themselves by virtue of their social status and politics to be youth. This does not deny the existence of other spheres of youth action or youth groups who are opposed to MASSOB and its activities. What is important in this context is how popular grassroots mobilization in Igboland is defined as youth-led or youth-allied, in opposition to the Nigerian state and its perceived client Igbo elite groups in Igboland.

Ako-na-Uche: Obanaeze Ndi Igbo and Politics from Above

A detailed reading of Nigeria's history since independence shows that virtually all ethnic groups in the country have a central ethnic organization committed to advancement of the collective interests and aspirations of each group. This provides the context within which the uneasy relations among Nigeria's 250 ethnic nationalities (or more) can be viewed. But the relations between the supposed 'mega ethnic-nationalities'- the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East- have been central to the tri-polar power struggle in Nigeria's post-independence politics. Based on the prevailing socio-political and economic contexts, and the emergence of new actors and forces in the Nigerian public space, mobilizations and manifestations of Igbo ethnic nationalism has undergone processes of change and renewal over the decades. Nascent forms of Igbo ethnic mobilization became evident in the first two decades of the 20th century as part of Igbo resistance to British colonial domination. But the decades of the 1920s and 1930s witnessed increased unsuccessful attempts in major Nigerian cities like

Lagos, Aba and Port-Harcourt to initiate a general or pan-Igbo union (Azikiwe 1970: 236-238; Ahanotu 1982: 166). In 1933, the quest for the establishment of an Igbo union was stated in a letter published in the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph* which voiced the “rebirth of the dying embers of Igbo national zeal” (Ota 1995: 75). In 1944, the Igbo Federal Union (IFU) was launched during an Igbo mass meeting, where Azikiwe² argued that “the Igbo had not been united because of superstition and ignorance, and that the Igbo, blessed as they were with natural resources, land and manpower, as well as a common language, could achieve a great deal if they would unite” (*West African Pilot* 19. 6. 1944 cited in Besselaar 1998: 267). The Union claimed to be pan-Nigerian, and even pan-African, but it had an Igbo national anthem, planned to establish an Igbo bank and an Igbo education scheme (*West African Pilot*, 23. 1. 1946 cited in Besselaar 1998: 268), and was closely aligned with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). Its membership was mainly made up of the educated elites: professionals, businessmen and politicians. In 1949, the Igbo Federal Union (IFU) was converted into the Igbo State Union (ISU) with the aim of protecting and advancing the overall interests of the Igbo, home and abroad, politically, economically, socially, culturally and practically in every respect (Irukwu 2007: 12). By January 1966, with the abrupt end of Nigeria’s First Republic following a military coup, the Igbo state Union (ISU) and all other ethnic organizations and associations were proscribed by the new military administration. This meant that for almost a decade no ethnic organization existed in Nigeria until the military opened up the political space and unbanned political activities in the run-up to the 1979 federal elections.

From its inception in 1976, *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* was meant to serve as a unifying apex organization for the Igbo and also assume the role of the former Igbo State Union (ISU) in the post-civil war Nigerian public space. In the process of its evolution, issues began to emerge around its structure and management systems, and there were perceptions from the Igbo at the grassroots level that the organization was not only immersed in partisan politics, but was equally non-democratic and elitist in nature (Irukwu 2007: 13). With the opening up of the political space in 1979 which ushered in Nigeria’s Second Republic, Igbo expectations of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* failed to materialize due to the fact that it was hijacked by post-civil war Igbo elites who sought to align with the ruling hegemonic elite from other sections of the country and submit to a subordinate role in the prevailing power configuration. For strategic reasons, the leadership of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* became inclined to the ruling Shehu Shagari-led National Party of Nigeria (NPN) at the centre and was largely recognised by many as the “Igbo wing” of the NPN operating under a different name. As it seemed then, the leadership of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* saw the emergence of Dr. Alex Ekwueme (a fellow Igbo) as vice president under the Hausa-Fulani-led Shehu Shagari government, not only as a solution to the lack of leadership in Igboland, but as a means of re-connecting to mainstream politics at the national level. There was a rallying of Igbo positions behind Dr. Ekwueme, and *Ohanaeze*

Ndi Igbo became strongly opposed to the Igbo and Azikiwe-led Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), arguing that Azikiwe and other Igbo in NPP should accord recognition to Dr. Ekwueme as the highest elected official from Igboland, but the NPP dismissed Dr. Ekwueme, the NPN and *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* and its leaders as stooges of the North.

Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo has however continued to grow and flourish since its inception, mainly driven and guided by the “*ako-na-uche*”³ philosophy which is less confrontational, subtle, tactful and diplomatic. Irukwu (2007: 66) points out that “*ako-na-uche*” calls for sound judgement in dealing with issues and situations, but more importantly, it “symbolises the value of approaching issues with the ancient wisdom of (Igbo) ancestors, dressed up with a lot of tact, diplomacy and respect for the interests and intelligence of others”. This conciliatory tone has marked *Ohanaeze’s* stance on Nigerian politics and shaped its dealings with the state in post-transition Nigeria. In May 2004, the leadership of the organization visited the then president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as part of the bridge-building efforts to reconcile the Igbo with all segments of the Nigerian society. The delegation comprised the “cream” of Igbo elites, professionals and politicians from all spheres of life, including traditional rulers and prominent Igbo women. The President of the organization, Professor Joe Irukwu, raised a number of topical issues including the need for true federalism, power shift, democracy, and emphasis on the mutuality of Igbo and Nigerian interest, among others (Irukwu 2007: 58-65). For the first time since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, it appeared that the *Ohanaeze* leadership and the Igbo political elite began to link Igbo interests in Nigeria to the collective national interest. The newfound principle of “*ako-na-uche*” embodied the vision of the entire Igbo elite and defined the basis of Igbo relations with other ethnic groups at the national level, but it soon became the “Achilles heel” of the organization the following year at the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) in 2005.

The National Political Reform Conference in 2005 was largely a response to the demand for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) by different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. But the Obasanjo administration deliberately left out the word “sovereign” from the title and mandate of the conference. Although some Igbo groups and prominent ethnic and civil society organizations in the country called for the absolute sovereignty of the conference or nothing, *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* as a body was quite prepared to settle for the national conference in the belief that “half bread is better than nothing” (Irukwu 2007: 67). This stance was informed by the organization’s belief that in any case, the Igbo still remains at the lowest wrung of the economic and political ladder in the country since the end of the war in 1970, a situation which it thinks can only improve, but not get worse after the NPRC. Unlike earlier conferences which were mainly concerned with addressing constitutional and political issues, the 2005 NPRC was charged with the responsibility of reforming all aspects of the country’s political, economic and social life, including its operational systems,

corporate behaviour and the conduct of people who direct and operate its institutions. Expectedly, different ethnic constituencies emerged with different agenda: “Yoruba Agenda”, “Arewa Schema”, “Middle Belt Outline”, “Itshekiri Chart”, “Urhobo Women Memo”, “National Women Schedule”, “Ijaw Position”, “Afenifere Arrangement”, and the “*Obanaeze Plan*” among others, which made the articulation of a common front virtually impossible.

For some strange reasons, the proposed *Obanaeze Plan* failed to address let alone resolve one of the most critical issues in post-war Igbo relations with Nigeria, the Igbo Presidency Project. Since the end of the civil war, the Igbo Presidency Project has been central to the resolution of the “Igbo Question” in Nigeria. While issues like power shift to the east, devolution of power from the centre to the periphery, true federalism, and equal access to resources and power all find expression under the “Igbo Question” in Nigeria, the “Igbo Presidency Project” seem to have become a cardinal negotiating point in Igbo quest for reinventing Nigeria. This assumption forms the basis of the tripod theory which holds that stability can only be achieved in the Nigerian federation when there is a balance between the three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo). But the inability of the *Obanaeze Ndi Igbo* and the entire Igbo leadership to articulate a coherent Igbo agenda on this issue and produce a formidable presidential candidate underscored the ineffectiveness of the organization. These failures were evidenced during the 1989-1993 Babangida transition programme, and replicated during the post-transition presidential elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, and recently in 2011. The contradiction between *Obanaeze Ndi Igbo* position and the realisation of the Igbo presidency was further deepened at the NPRC in 2006. At the Abakaliki Zonal hearing of the Constitutional Review Committee, the then president of the organisation, Professor Joe Irukwu, reportedly endorsed the position of the governors from the region, most of whom favoured tenure extension for the president and other political office-holders. This was considered a tacit approval of the president’s third term agenda and a sell-out by the *Obanaeze* leadership on the “Igbo Presidency Project” for 2007. But remarkably, despite all the efforts invested in the NPRC, it failed to gain any legal status and remained largely inconclusive. President Obasanjo succeeded in fashioning out a heavily diluted version of the conference and attempted to use the conference to push for the amendment of the 1999 Constitution that would grant him a third term in office beyond the end of his tenure in 2007. His Third Term Project finally failed at the National Assembly in May 2006. But the alleged role of the *Obanaeze Ndi Igbo* leadership in this despicable project further served to discredit the organisation and its entire leadership.

*Nzogbu Nzogbu Enyimba Enyi*⁴: MASSOB and Politics from Below

Spurred by a specific reading of Nigeria's political history, MASSOB was established in Lagos on 13 September 1999, barely four months after Nigeria's return to civil rule, to promote the interest of Igbo-speaking Nigerians (or Biafrans) who constitute one of the three main ethnic groups in the country. The advent of MASSOB was a direct response to the perceived failure of the Nigerian state and successive governments to address the Igbo predicament since the end of the civil war in 1970. Between 1970 when the civil war ended, and 1999 when the ghost of Biafra was publicly resuscitated with the founding of MASSOB, Igbo socio-cultural platforms like *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*, *Aka Ikenga*, *Mkpoko Igbo*, Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), *Odenigbo Forum*, South East Movement (SEM), Igbo National Assembly (INA), Ndi Igbo Liberation Forum, Igbo Salvation Front (ISF), Igbo Redemption Council (IRC), Igbo Peoples Congress (IPC) and the Igbo Question Movement (IQM) existed,⁵ but none of these groups espoused a radical or confrontational agenda. There were youth-dominated (but not exclusively made up of youths) Igbo groups that emerged in post-transition Nigeria like the Igbo Youth Council (IYC), Igbo Youth Movement (IYM), the Bakassi Boys, the Federated Council of Igbo Youths (FCIY). Though these are not inclined to separatism they exhibit a more vibrant form of Igbo ethnic nationalism in their approach for equity and justice in Nigeria. The third group comprises what is known as the "neo-Biafran" movement. This group includes MASSOB, the Biafra Youth Congress (BYC), MASSOB International, Biafran Liberation Council (BLC), and the Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups (COBLIG) which claims to be an umbrella body comprising seven Igbo liberation groups in Nigeria and two in Diaspora.⁶

Led by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike, an Indian-trained lawyer, MASSOB emerged as a post-civil war second generation nationalist movement that does not only contest Igbo marginalization since the end of the civil war but intends to resuscitate Igbo ambitions for self-determination. Uwazuruike had been a member of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and had supported the election of Olusegun Obasanjo in February 1999, but became disappointed when President Obasanjo made federal appointments which he claimed excluded the Igbo who massively voted for him.⁷ In several newspaper interviews, Uwazuruike alludes on an ethnic conspiracy reached between the Hausa and Yoruba after the civil war in 1970, and claims that "the main issue that led to the formation of MASSOB is the marginalisation, discrimination, elimination, subjugation of Ndi Igbo in Nigeria" (Daily Champion 19. 11. 2007: 41; *The News* 10. 4. 2000). These views were also articulated in a petition submitted by *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* to the Human Rights Violations Investigating Committee in 1999, in which the group lamented the continued marginalization and under-representation of Igbo in the federal government and its agencies, especially, in the armed forces; and

the discrimination in matters of revenue allocation, financial aids, federal government investments and other amenities (Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo 2001).

MASSOB claims that its main objectives include: the actualization of the independent state of Biafra; supporting all entities using peaceful means to bring about Biafra; encouraging sincere and honest dialogue with all ethnic nationalities in Nigeria aimed at peaceful separation of Biafra; and informing the world about the actualisation of Biafra.⁸ These objectives are two-fold: the first entails pressuring federal, state and local authorities to convene a referendum in the Southeast in order to ascertain the willingness of the Igbo to secede or remain in the Nigerian project; the second involves the ultimate creation of an independent state of Biafra if the referendum says so. Uwazuruike further contends that the condition of the Igbo in Nigeria is unacceptable and calls for the disintegration of the country along ethnic lines, reminiscent of the Soviet experience (IRIN News 2005). Tacitly expressed, the crux of MASSOB's campaign is geared towards an arrangement promoting the peaceful and orderly "disengagement" of the Igbo nation from the Nigerian project into an alternative political and administrative arrangement. The movement's main concern with the plight of the Igbo ethnic group forecloses the participation of other ethnic groups in its quest for independence. MASSOB's "disengagement" effort has also latched on the deployment of ethnicity as a critical referent as a way of safeguarding Igbo interests and entrenching the self-help inclinations of the Nigerian public space.

MASSOB has an organizational structure which places the leader of the movement at the apex, and supported by National Representatives, National Co-ordinators, Ambassadors, Secretaries, Regional Administrators, Chief Area Administrators, Area Administrators, Provincial Officers, District Officers and ordinary members of the movement. In its early years, the membership of the movement was estimated to be about six million, eighty percent of which were based in Nigeria (Adekson 2004: 90). MASSOB has widespread influence in the former Eastern Region which it refers to as the 30 Regions of Biafra and the leadership of the movement has declared 25 stages in the struggle for the actualization of Biafra with each stage featuring a different strategy as the struggle intensifies. In contrast to the earlier brand of Igbo nationalism that led to the Biafran secession which had substantial consensus among the Igbo ethnic group at home and in the Diaspora, the present idea of secession is not popular with most of the older generation of the Igbo. MASSOB claims to be a peaceful movement and has unequivocally stated that the core philosophy in the realisation of its goal is the "principle of non-violence". However, in the bid to realise its goals and provide security for its members, the movement invariably denies other members of the public their right to security, and promotes an "ethnicization" of the public sphere as an autonomous space from the state and civic public.

On 22 May 2000, in a symbolic hoisting of the Biafran flag, the movement officially presented the Declaration of Demand for a Sovereign State of Biafra from the People and Government of Nigeria. The dynamics of MASSOB's struggle for self-determination subsequently assumed local salience with the emergence and proliferation of alternative state structures in South-eastern Nigeria. Apart from challenging the sovereignty of the Nigerian state over Igbo land, MASSOB evokes "counter-claims of sovereignty", enacts specific "regimes of security" and seeks to create alternative spaces of "power and influence" in the region. On 1 July 2009, as part of events to celebrate its 10th anniversary, the movement launched the "Biafran International Passport" at the Freedom House in Okwe, Onuimo Local Government Area of Imo State. These developments challenge the "absolutist" posture of the Nigerian state as the main source of social rules guiding the day-to-day existence of the people in the region. It also calls into question the state-centric approaches to governance and empirically unveils alternative forms of social regulation and governance as a form of resistance against formal state control and sovereignty. The mobilisation of ethno-nationalist identities in territorial and spatial terms as springboards for claim-making is salient by virtue of its capacity to challenge the validity and territorial integrity of extant states.

It is within the scope of this paper to flag the nature of these developments and how they have played out in MASSOB's struggle for Igbo self-determination in Nigeria. In a bid to dismantle every infrastructure that is used to support the Nigerian government in the region, MASSOB has embarked on various forms of civil disobedience. Remarkable in this regard is the various successful and unsuccessful attempts to hoist the green-red-black Biafran flag in major roads, streets, bill boards and strategic places in the Southeast, a practice that has become a regular feature in marking the anniversary of the re-declaration of Biafra every May 30. The movement established the Biafran Security Agency (BSA) to take on board broader security issues in major cities in the Southeast and to engage in civic and communal functions like the enforcement of rules of residence in Igbo states (or what it refers to as Biafran territories) and pegging of rents where it is deemed to be exorbitant. Sanitation laws are also enforced in urban cities in the Southeast with punitive measures for defaulters; attempts are made to vend and enforce the official price of petroleum products in filling stations in Igbo states and there have been forceful seizure of fuel tankers moving from any part of the region to the Northern parts of the country as a sign of protest against the non-supply of adequate products to the Southeast (*The Guardian* 30. 11. 2000). On 26 August 2004, the movement rallied traders and civil servants of Igbo ethnic extraction to observe a sit-at-home order which was widely adhered to. Although, the last order on 28 August 2008 did not achieve much success the movement claims to be in control of the 30 regions of Biafra which comprises parts of the South-east and South-south Nigeria. The movement also mobilized for the boycott of the National Identity Card Scheme, and the last census exercise (in 2006) in Igbo states of the southeast on the grounds that these states are not part of Nigeria, but Biafran territory, and therefore, harassing and

intimidating those who participated (*Saturday Champion* 7. 7. 2007: 14; *Daily Sun* 1. 12. 2008: 19). In the 2007 national elections, MASSOB mobilised the Igbo ethnic group in the Southeast, Igbo political aspirants and office-holders through the use of handbills, posters and newspapers to boycott the elections since it perceives the region as a separate entity and not as a part of Nigeria.⁹

Inter-Generational Relations and the Dialectics of Contestations: MASSOB versus *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*

At the inception of MASSOB in 1999, many prominent Igbo politicians, legislators, governors from the Southeast states, and the apex Igbo socio-cultural organization *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* quickly distanced themselves from the movement and reminded Uwazuruike that the dream of Biafra died in 1970 (Akinyele 2001: 633). While prominent elite Igbo groups like *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* and *Aka Ikenga*, and the Igbo political class all agree to the need to address the place of the Igbo in a post-civil war Nigerian project, their opposition to MASSOB is predicated largely on disagreements on the best strategies for pursuing a collective Igbo agenda. The uneasy relationship between MASSOB and the *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* is captured in the words of the former Secretary-General of *Ohanaeze*, Chief Joe Achuzia, who made the following remarks about MASSOB:

‘For me as an Ohanaeze chieftain, it (MASSOB) does not convey the type of meaning that should give me joy... That the youths, because of the severe hardship unleashed in the polity, now feel that they would rather pursue a separatist alternative should not give us joy, because we know the consequences of such a division.’ (Ejinkeonye 2005).

Ohanaeze’s disinclination to MASSOB activities was confirmed when the immediate past President-General of organization, Chief Ralph Uwechue, retorted that “things are generally bad for everyone in Nigeria and not just for the Igbo alone” and does not require anyone taking up arms (VOBI 2009), in response to recent killings of the Igbo in the Northern part of the country.

Closely aligned to *Ohanaeze* is a prominent Igbo group, known as *Aka Ikenga*. *Aka Ikenga* is an Igbo think-tank and is popularly referred to as the “intellectual wing” of *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo*, and like *Ohanaeze* opposes the MASSOB agenda and proposes an alternative agenda for pursuing a collective Igbo agenda. Comprising of young thriving Igbo professionals from several works of life, *Aka Ikenga* was formed in 1988 in the throes of the structural adjustment crises and military dictatorship in Nigeria. Its main purpose was to act as a pressure group to agitate for the inclusion of the Igbo

in mainstream politics and to carve out its own share of the national patrimony. In recent times, the group has called on the Igbo to move away from regurgitating the memories of the civil war and Igbo marginalization in Nigeria, but to chart a new course for the future. Through the organization of periodic lectures, seminars and conferences, the group uses its contacts to influence decisions and engage the present crop of Igbo political leadership at the national, state and local levels to make a difference in their offices. Pressing home the need for a different strategy, the vice-president of the group, Chief Goddy Uwazurike, maintained that:

“Ojukwu (the former Biafran secessionist leader) fought at 34, he will not fight at 54. Now in his 70s, he merely advises. The message of MASSOB sinks in within the youths in Igboland who did not witness the civil war” (personal interview 15. 1. 2009).

The separatist alternative pursued by MASSOB contrasts with the moderate and conservative stance of *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo and Aka Ikenga*. On several occasions, MASSOB has openly accused both groups of complicity in the subversion of the Igbo agenda, describing them as a group of “elderly cowards” who have aided the marginalization of the Igbo (Akinyele 2001: 634). On this basis, possibilities for constructive engagement between these opposing views have completely collapsed on many occasions and have sometimes led to open threats of attack on prominent Igbo elites by MASSOB members and an attempt to disrupt the Igbo Day celebrations in 2008 (*The Nation*, 30. 9. 2008; *Daily Punch* 22. 9. 2008).

In spite of its acclaimed pacifism and principle of non-violence, it was inevitable that MASSOB would clash with state security operatives in the course of its activities. Government official government position, at the national and state levels, is that the group is irresponsible and illegal (*Thisday* 11. 8. 2000). Various clashes between MASSOB and State Security Service (SSS) personnel have resulted in the clamp down of the movement and its members across the East and other parts of the country. With the tacit and open support of Igbo governors in the Southeast there have been several raids on the movement’s hideouts across the region leading to the discovery of Biafran flags, Biafran military uniforms, belts, umbrellas, currencies, stickers, pictures of Biafran soldiers in military uniforms in training camp, Biafran documents, sewing machines and almanacs of Biafran hierarchy (see *Daily Champion*, 17. 11. 2008; *personal interview* 26. 01. 2009). In previous census exercises and elections, while MASSOB mobilised the Igbo of the Southeast through the use of handbills, posters and newspapers to boycott the elections since it perceives the region as a separate entity and not as a part of Nigeria, the Igbo political class and Igbo office-holders have either dismissed or failed to heed MASSOB’s requests.

In view of these differences, *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo, Aka Ikenga*, and the entire Igbo political class (comprising governors, senators and members of the House of Representatives from the Southeast) reluctantly demonstrated their ability to safeguard "Igbo interests" when they unanimously called for Uwazuruike's release while he was detained by the state. But the decision to release him took so long because the call for his release was not as popular as it seemed among the Igbo elites, compared to the strong agitation for his release expressed by most Igbo youths.¹⁰ While MASSOB's relations with the Igbo political class in the south-east remains strained, the case of Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State appears to be different. MASSOB supported the emergence of the governor as the candidate of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). The Elections Petitions Tribunal ruled in Obi's favour against the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, Chris Ngige, in the rigged 2003 elections in the state. Relations between MASSOB and Governor Peter Obi soon deteriorated following a self-imposed responsibility by the former to evict the National Association of Road Transport Workers (NARTO) from motor parks and markets in the city of Onitsha, the violence which erupted prompted the governor to issue a shoot-at-sight order which resulted in the death of several MASSOB activists.¹¹

The division between the popular/youth group on the one hand, and the elite/older generation of Igbo on the other hand, produces similar internal discourses and divergences over what an "authentic" Igbo "ideal" and "agenda" should be, and the legitimate manner for actualizing it. Between elite-led Igbo groups and MASSOB, there are appeals to "modern", "enlightened" and educated "ideals" and "ideas" by the former; versus the "naïve", "unenlightened" and "irrational" approach by the latter. The generational dimension of this divide is also prominent when it comes to who can best represent and defend the Igbo culture and interest in the Nigerian federation. The leadership of *Ohanaeze* and other elite-led Igbo groups espouse pro-Nigerian sentiments and claim to speak the mind of the Igbo in a manner that would benefit the Igbo and all Nigerians at large. MASSOB has, however, demonstrated its ability to rally Igbo youths, artisans and people at the grassroots level when it announced a sit-at-home order to commemorate the "Biafra Day" in 2004 which was widely observed and adhered to. *Ohanaeze* and other Igbo elites were surprised by the success of the event. But more importantly, the possibility that the *Ohanaeze* elitist agenda may be supplanted by youth power and enthusiasm led the organization to launch a less-divisive and controversial annual "Igbo National Day" celebration which has since undermined and subverted the MASSOB version.

One of prominent member of the Igbo elite who appears to straddle the divide between the MASSOB and *Ohanaeze* agenda is the erstwhile Biafran leader, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. Though recognized as a member of the Igbo elite, Ojukwu's relationship with *Ohanaeze* since he returned to the country in 1982 after twelve years in exile has always been uneasy. On his return from exile he compounded the political situation with his

unwillingness to accept and align with the extant political structures in Igboland which involved recognizing the pre-eminent leadership of Azikiwe in Igboland, the new leadership of Ekwueme in NPN and the political agenda of *Obanaeze*. Ojukwu was still intent on asserting his political leadership of the Igbo. In the bid to re-enact his leadership, Ojukwu founded the “Ikemba Front” in 1983 as partisan political organisation and tried to use his place in Igbo history to garner votes from his people and seek election into the Senate. This political project failed in 1983 when his own senatorial district rejected his candidacy. By May 1996, Ojukwu had another face-off with *Obanaeze* following his crowning as *Eze Igbo* (Igbo King). In its capacity as the apex Igbo socio-political organization, *Obanaeze* issued a full page newspaper advertisement rejecting Ojukwu’s claim, and also informed the Nigerian government and general public that the title, *Eze Igbo* does not exist (The Week 1996). Predictably, Ojukwu reacted by accusing the leaders of *Obanaeze* of being complicit in the marginalization and oppression of the Igbo, and thus, are incapable and unqualified of leading the Igbo (Tempo 1996).

With the advent of MASSOB, Ojukwu was initially reluctant to lend his support to MASSOB’s resuscitation of the Biafran dream. Ojukwu’s position swayed to the neo-Biafran cause when he attended the opening of the Biafra House in Washington D.C while on a medical checkup in the United States in September 2001. Since his return to Nigeria, Ojukwu has consistently maintained that given the situation at the time that the Biafran secession bid was justified and that he has no apologies to make for his actions. However, he maintains that the existence of Biafra as a political reality was in the past, and that what prevails at the moment is “Biafra of the mind” which must be rooted in principles like justice, civil liberty and opposition to genocide, the absence of which led to Biafran secession in 1967 (Tell 2001). Ojukwu still claims that Biafra represents an opinion which should be allowed to flourish in democratic society and that Uwazuruike is more courageous than many who claim to be Igbo leaders (Iheanacho 2004). Ojukwu has since participated actively in Nigerian politics, contested two presidential elections in 2003 and 2007, and headed an Igbo political party, known as, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). But he has never failed to warn the Nigerian authorities that he might lead a second secession if they continue to treat the Igbo with contempt (Insider Weekly 2001). Ojukwu enjoyed broad respect, admiration and adulation among the Igbo until his death on 26 November 2011 in a London hospital, and was given a state funeral with full military honours by the president and people of Nigeria.

“Betwixt” and “Between”: Contemporary Igbo Nationalism at a Crossroad

This study draws on the notion of generations to offer insights into processes and events that have characterised Igbo nationalism since Nigeria’s return to civil rule in 1999. Apart from the age, class and milieu divide, the identity of the opposing generational groups

stem from an open debate on the failed legacy of the old(er) generation and capacity of the young(er) generation to construct the future. Based on history and time, different conceptions of superiority inform the political agency of both *Obanaeze* and MASSOB, and consequently, open up new spaces for social and political agenda. MASSOB depicts *Obanaeze* as representative of a generation of conservative elders who have been co-opted by state, silenced young people and prevented the development of a progressive Igbo political agenda, while *Obanaeze* sees MASSOB as a group of naïve, unenlightened, irrational and ill-informed cohort without respect for established authority in Igboland. Generational politics provides a veritable context that brings the fracture between these critical constituencies in contemporary Igbo nationalism to the fore.

Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, after thirteen years of military rule, certainly relaxed the repressive nature of the state but opened up a paradoxical space for a host of hitherto suppressed and dormant ethnic forces, and a future vector for alternative social and political projects in the country. Thus, the abrupt projection of MASSOB on to the centre of the political space provides an alternative for radical politics in Igboland, while the future of *Obanaeze* boils down to its capacity to remain relevant and ensure that youth ascendancy does not destabilize or erode its power base. These contestations are particularly played out in relation to who has the authority to speak for the Igbo on issues regarding the safety of the Igbo in other parts of the country, and on the Igbo presidency project. MASSOB's quick reaction in providing buses to convey the Igbo in the North back to the southeast at the height of the ethnic and religious crises in region, and its reiteration for an Igbo presidency in 2015, led to *Obanaeze's* extension of similar gestures to the Igbo in the North and the issuing of a warning to MASSOB that it cannot speak for the Igbo on the latter. Thus, a generational perspective provides insights into understanding the transformation of local politics in Igboland, one that pits an emergent youth movement against an enduring Igbo establishment.

Indeed, the political agenda of MASSOB and *Obanaeze* reflect the dissensions and divisions that characterize most nationalist projects in contemporary Nigeria as they compete with other groups in the struggle for space, power and resources in Nigeria. As Mustapha (2004: 273) reminds us, "instead of having distinct identity blocks intent on dismembering the country, what we have are overlapping claims and counter-claims. Disentangling these is virtually impossible". Breaking decisively from almost forty years of perceived Igbo marginalization in post-civil war Nigeria, the emergence of MASSOB in 1999 constitutes a challenge to the entire Igbo political and elite class who are aligned with the state and owe their position to the ruling party at the centre. Given its current fragmentations, contradictions and challenges, it is apposite to state that the emancipatory potentials of contemporary Igbo nationalism, on both sides of the generational divide, still remain in question. Ruptured by conflicts and marked by a sense of lack of legitimacy, both MASSOB and *Obanaeze*, have witnessed rifts and factional in-fighting for positions and offices from which material benefit could be gained. Since

2006, *Obanaeze* has witnessed a protracted leadership crisis which has effectively robbed it of its status in Igboland, while the rift which emerged after Uwazuruike's incarceration in 2005 has led to the emergence of at least four splinter groups from MASSOB.

Caught betwixt and between, the search for the resolution of perceived Igbo marginalization in Nigeria continues in perpetuity. On the one hand, MASSOB believes it represents and defends Igbo culture and interest in a federation it perceives as structured against Igbo interest. This informs the movement's rejection of a state-led process, and explains why it latches on to ethnicity and a nationalist ideal to pursue the dream of a "New Biafra". On the other hand, *Obanaeze's* conciliatory stance with the state with emphasis on devolution of power from the centre to the periphery, true federalism, and equal access to resources and power, power shift to the east, and ultimately, an Igbo presidency is yet to yield any substantial outcome. Given this backdrop, there is a general perception that the Igbo are neither fully part of Nigeria nor are citizens of an alternative political and administrative arrangement. It is this dialectic between outright an "independence" from the Nigerian state and the possibility of realizing the "Igbo presidency" project within the Nigerian state that structures the political agenda of each generation. This inter-generational relationship is generating a sense of cyclical continuity in Igbo nationalism, one which is occasionally twisted or distorted by the eruption of events nationally or locally, and its insertion into each other.

(Endnotes)

- 1 *Obanaeze Ndi Igbo* means 'the people (entire community or nation) and the leaders of the Igbo people'.
- 2 Nnamdi Azikiwe, popularly known as "Zik", was a prominent Nigerian nationalist politician who was at the forefront of Nigeria's struggle for independence. He was also regarded as the pride and hope of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.
- 3 "Ako" means idea; "uche" means reason/reasoning
- 4 This is an Igbo war chant which means "stampede to death, stampede to death, expedition-bound elephants"
- 5 Some of these groups emerged in the early and mid-1990s and have either ceased to exist (or are dormant) or still remain active. Their existence and activities are gleaned from Nigerian newspapers, author's fieldwork and interviews.
- 6 See <<http://www.biafraland.com/NewsAnalysis2009/newsanalysis050809.htm>>.
- 7 See 'Nobody Can Stop Biafra', *The News*, 7 January 2000, p. 42.
- 8 Interview with Area Administrator (Lagos), MASSOB, 26 January 2009.
- 9 See the Report on the Election Boycott at: <<http://www.biafra.cwis.org/pdf/REPORT%20ON%20ELECTION.pdf>>, accessed on 27. 2. 2009.
- 10 'MASSOB: Why Senate Turned its Back on Uwazuruike', *Saturday Champion*, 7. 7. 2007: 14.
- 11 See Okey Maduforo 'Nigeria: Obi Betrayed MASSOB, Says Uwazuruike', *MASSOB News (Daily Independent, Lagos)*, <<http://massobnews.com/2009/08/08/nigeria-obi-betrayed-massob-says-uwazuruike>>, accessed 25.8.09.

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