
NON-STATE MILITANT GROUPS IN POST NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR SOUTH EASTERN –NIGERIA: THE MASSOB AND IPOB PARADOX

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Abstract:

The phenomenal increase in the use of terrorism, politically induced assassinations, strikes, public riots, military coup detats, etc. as tools of attainment of political objectives especially within the context of post-civil war Nigerian political process tended to suggest the need for better appreciation of violence as a political tool for statecraft in Nigeria. While it is true that the Nigerian civil war was resolved exclusively by Nigerian people with proclamation of ‘No Victor, No Vanquished ’ and the 3Rs (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration) policy, the post civil-war agenda of national integration of the Nigerian ethnic divides remains largely unattainable. It is equally a curious observation that the protagonist ethnic group (the Igbos) that ignited the Nigerian civil-war is an ethnic group that arguably has most of her capital investments and preponderance majority of her people outside Igbo territorial domain. Yet, the Igbos are still clamouring for balkanization of the Nigerian state as depicted by proactive contestation of Nigerian state sovereignty over Eastern Nigeria by MASSOB and IPOB. The focal point of this paper therefore is the exploration of the conceptual frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of violence as political tool with a view to establishing power relations context that engendered politically motivated violence. Theoretical postulations on political violence will be explored as an explanatory theory to explain the synergy between governance and the emergence of MASSOB and IPOB in southeastern Nigeria political space.

Keywords:

Political Violence, Balkanization, and Governance

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism by definition is dependent on ideological perception, historical context of state power relations and extant international community value system. Terrorism is therefore a subjective, value laden term. For disadvantaged individual(s), group(s) and/or state(s), any deliberate political action of a stronger party(ies) /state(s) to compel obedience of all and sundry to extant political, social, cultural, religious and more significantly economic relations status-quo is conceived as an act of state terrorism. Whereas violent act(s) perpetuated by disadvantaged individual(s), group(s) and/or state(s) who perceived the existing order as unjust and unfair, are construed by established order /authority(ies) as terrorism.

For elucidation purpose, a few examples will suffice here. Nelson Mandela life is quite instructive in understanding the relative conceptualization of terrorism. Nelson Mandela now recognized as the most outstanding personality in the world in the last one hundred years was once jailed for twenty seven years on charges of terrorism. From the very beginning Nelson Mandela was and is still hero to Africans whereas for a long time he was a terrorist according to the parlance of the western world. Yaz Arafat of PLO, Begin of Israel, Che Guverra and Fidel Castro of Cuba were once upon a time terrorists but are today regarded as foremost freedom fighters. To Ronald Regan regime in USA in the 1980s, Jonas Savimbi, UNITA leader in Angola was a freedom fighter and the same regime regarded Augusto Neto MPLA leader as a terrorist. Whereas the dominant views of African leaders (Head of States) of the epoch thought differently.

In a nutshell, plurality of views engendered by ideological divide, racial and religious persuasion congruent on historical specificities of individual states' make concise conceptualization of what constitute terrorism or terrorist act(s) problematic. What is however discernible is that terrorism is a derogative term usually employed by people or state(s) on the receiving end to describe violent political act(s) that tended to undermine their capacity for effective governance and/or limit their influence and/or control of state power.

It is however important to note that terrorism has devastating consequences for the sustenance of international peace and order.(Sachs,2003,) Thus, response to political violence must of necessity be informed by understanding of definitive objective reality of the material conditions that engendered the political process and cultural context facilitating political choice of violence as communicative strategy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework is central to meaningful research effort. This is because theories are mental constructs through which researchers perceive and interpret the world (Dougherty. & Pfaltzgraff, Jr., 2001,p. 1). Theories serve as exploratory and explanatory paradigm for researchers to study, explain and predict social issues and phenonmena (Anthony, 2018, p.62) Various theories have been propounded on political violence in Africa. Samuel E. Finer's four levels of military intervention theory; Laurence Radway adaptation of Hobbes, Marx and Pareto works to explain military intervention in African politics; Robert Collis's Psycho-Biological theory; Amos Perlmutter's military 'corporateness' theory; Morris Janowitz, Lucian Pye, et al military characteristic theory; Samuel Huntington's Politicization of Social Forces theory; Eric Nodlinger's Personal Ambition theory; Ali Mazrui Politico-Cultural Incongruity theory; Claude Welch's Contagious theory; J. M. Lee and Van Doorn, Systemic Failure theory (Afowowe, 1998,p.99) and Claude Ake's 'Over-valuing of Power' theory (Ake, 1988, p.120) are landmark studies on African states propensities to



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engage violence in the political process with far reaching consequences for internal security of African states.

VIOLENCE AS A TOOL IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL SPACE

There are also notable literature on the specific manifestations violence in the Nigeria political process. Obafemi Awolowo documented his personal experiences in the First Republic Nigerian political process (Awolowo, 1987). He gave several instances of violent (physical and psychological) actions against his person and political associates in his personal struggle to acquire political power through the legitimate electoral process. He was persuaded that his political opponents negated the basic ethics and norms upon which democratic institutions could thrive.

Madiebo have an insightful account of his involvement in the Nigerian political process (Madiebo, 1980), first, as a commissioned officer of the Nigerian Army and later as the Chief of Army Staff of the defunct Biafran Army. Madiebo identified the historical and leadership challenges that made violent conflicts endemic in the Nigerian First Republic. He was of the opinion that colonial government policies in Nigeria created the challenges that inevitably cumulated into the fratricidal civil war in Nigeria and concluded that the war was avoidable with sacrificial leadership. Ademoyega (Ademoyega, 1981) was one of the five majors of the Nigerian Army that truncated the Nigerian First Republic on January 15, 1966. Ademoyega provided what he considered as politico-economic imperatives necessitating violent overthrow of an elected government. What is clearly discernible from Ademoyega account of events leading to January 15, 1966 coup d'état in Nigeria was that the Majors were inspired by activities of Col. Abdul Nasser in Egypt. Indeed, Ademoyega cohort belonged to the first set of university graduates to be commissioned to the Nigerian Army. It is equally instructive that this first set of graduates engineered a major coup d'état with devastating consequences for the Nigerian state within four years of their commission. Augustus Adebayo was a bureaucrat and academician who served at the highest echelon of the two professions in Nigeria (Adebayo, 1986). Adebayo provided very useful insights to the dynamics of decision making process within the context of military rule in Nigeria. He was of the view that the power elite have developed a mechanism of perpetuating his interests through the instrumentality of the Nigerian state particularly during military regimes.

Fawole was of the view that the use of violence in the political process is an action engendered by self-interest of political actors (Fawole, 1994; 14). He reasoned:

Coups (a manifestation of violence in political process) have taken place in African states mostly at such times when defined military interests (the corporate interests of the force and the elite interests of the officer corps) have been directly trampled upon or about to be trampled upon by governments. 'Ex-post facto' justifications for coups- such as civilian incompetence, declining legitimacy, corruption, nepotism, religious and ethnic violence, social disintegration-are mere excuses calculated to conceal real facts (Fawole, 1994; 14).

Karl Maier chronologically documented Nigerian political regimes (Maier, 2002). He critically evaluated Nigerian political leadership with a view to providing motivational reasons for their action(s) and/or inaction(s). Several instances of violence in the Nigerian political process (including

ethnic militia) were cited in Maier's work. He concluded that Nigerian political process is dominated by self-centred parasitic political elite.

Achebe equally provided useful insights to the political power configuration in Nigeria that cumulated into inter-ethnic power struggle that was epitomized in the Nigerian civil war (Achebe, 2012). Achebe posited:

...because part of the way to respond to confusion in Nigeria is to blame those from the other ethnic group or the other side of the country. (Achebe, 2012,p.66)...As we reach the brink of full blown war it became clear to me that the chaos enveloping all of us in Nigeria was due to the incompetence of the Nigerian ruling class. They clearly had a poor grasp of history and found it difficult to appreciate and grapple with Nigeria's ethnic and political complexity. This clique, stunted by ineptitude, distracted by power games and the pursuit of material comforts, was unwilling if not incapable of saving our fledgling new nation (Achebe, 2012,p.69)....Suddenly, I realized that the only valid basis for existence is one that gives security to you and your people. It is as simple as that (. Achebe,2012.p.71)

Mathew Kukah provided the historical origin of ethnic militia in Niger Delta region of Nigeria as well as political, social and economic dynamics of military regimes in Nigeria that accentuated the militia activities in the Niger Delta (Kukah, 2012). Kukah observed that Niger Delta militant groups actions tended to challenge the legitimacy of the Nigerian state and inevitably the Nigerian government. This challenge elicited different responses from different regimes according to him.

Oladele traced the origin of violence in the Nigerian political process to the colonial era (Oladele, 2004). He identified major historical landmarks in political violence in Nigeria to include the 1929 Aba women's riot, the 1931 Egba women's uprising, the 1945 general workers strike, the 1949 Enugu Coal workers revolt and the 1953 Kano riot. Having examined theoretical postulations on ethnic militias in Nigeria, Oladele observed that Nigerian state provided the material environment that nurtured ethnic militias in Nigeria. He equally observed that the Nigerian state response to ethnic militias created gross human right abuses.

Bolaji Akinyemi discourse on *Ethnic Militias and the National Question in Nigeria* provided very useful insights for understanding the complexities that provided the impetus for militant agitation by ethnic militias in the Nigerian political space(Akinyemi, 2007) . Akinyemi posited that ethnic militancy is not peculiarly a Nigerian phenomenon. He contended that it is a historical challenge associated with nation building. It is a prominent feature of every multi-ethnic state. Akinyemi further argued that most states in the world have passed through or are still passing through the challenges of militancy engendered by multi-ethnic composition of state(s). Akinyemi made copious references to United States of America and Britain experiences with ethnic organised militancy to undermine the political order and value system. Particular references were made by Akinyemi to organised violence perpetuated by Black Panthers, Christian and white supremacy militant organizations in United States of America.



Akinyemi contended that it is only the plural societies with a functioning federal system of government like United States of America that have been able to develop a functional political framework that considerably undermine the basis of existence of ethnic militias. Akinyemi provided an insight to the historical and social context of origins of ethnic militias in Nigeria. He posited that the Nigeria state was established by the British colonial authority without consultation with the peoples of Nigeria. Through the various constitutional conferences where major ethnic interests were represented that led to Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigeria was able to fashion a federal system that reasonably addressed the major concerns of ethnic groups in Nigeria. Akinyemi asserted that it was the military intervention in the Nigerian political process that exacerbated the ethnic based militant organizations in Nigeria. He posited:

The intervention of the military has had two consequences for the national question. The first was the destruction of the federal system and adoption of a pseudo-federal system with a powerful centre. Even the constitutions which the military bequeathed to succeeding civilian regimes reflected its belief that it is only an over-centralised system that can contain the competing nationalities of Nigeria, whereas the competing nationalities of Nigeria have reached the opposite conclusion that it is only within a proper federal system that their interests can be safeguarded (Akinyemi, 2007,p.41)

Akinyemi equally argued that the public perception of the Nigerian Army as an ethnic dominated army of doubtful nationalistic commitment undermined the possibility of the military to create a broad based political consensus that can forge and develop nationalistic agenda that can unite the competing ethnic interests in Nigeria. Akinyemi argued:

The second consequence which derives from the first has a bearing to the earlier description of the Nigerian Army as an ethnic militia in an unclassical way. The other nationalities in Nigeria regard the post-military constitution not only as unfederal but, more importantly, as having been designed to serve the interest of the Hausa-Fulani(Akinyemi,2007,p. 42).

In other words, Akinyemi concluded that undermining of the federal system of government in Nigeria engendered by military intervention and subsequent efforts by military regimes to foist 'unfederal' constitutions on Nigeria created the objective historical conditions for emergence of militant groups in Nigeria political space. He further contended that almost all ethnic groups in Nigeria now have ethnic militias that purportedly represent and defend the myopic interests of the ethnic interests within the context of parochial political boundaries. The only exceptions being the Arewa and Ijaw ethnic militias.

A common characteristic of these ethnic militias is that, as militant as they all are, they are defensive in terms of their territorial areas of operation. Even though there are non-indigenous settlements all over the country, most of the ethnic militias operate only within the heartland of their individual nationality. The only two exceptions are the Ijaw National Congress (INC) and the Arewa People's Congress (APC). The

Ijaw, being a coastal people, have laid claim to any part of the coastline where there are Ijaw settlement- a claim stoutly resisted by others. The Fulani, represented by Arewa, have implied by behaviour that they are not territorial in the sense of regarding anywhere there are Fulani settlements as Fulaniland (Akinyemi,2007,p. 43)

Within the context of Nigeria present historical reality, Akinyemi believed that the only viable solution to ethnic based militant agitation against perceived political and economic marginalization (real or imagined) is for Nigeria to organize a national sovereign conferences where every ethno-religious interests will discuss their fears and grievances with a view of creating national consensus for a virile, stable and prosperous Nigerian state.

Agbaje *The Historical Antecedent Of The Phenomenon Of Ethnic Militias In Nigeria* provided the historical analysis of the Nigerian state in the colonial and post-colonial periods that impacted the Nigerian political process and consequently engendered ethnic militias as prominent feature of the Nigerian political community (Agbaje,2007). Agbaje identified behavioural tendencies of the Nigerian political elite in history that invariably cumulated into ethnic militias.

...the rise and resilience of tradition of political brinkmanship, involving threats and counter-threats of breakdown of rule-induced and system-supportive behaviour in contexts etched by the tendency of the political elite to prefer fission to fusion, coming apart rather than sticking together, at moments of great national crises, provided the background to the emergence of contemporary forms of ethnic militias in Nigeria from the 1990s(Agbaje,2007,p.18).

Agbaje contended that the Nigerian elite during the colonial and post-colonial epochs failed to create institutions and alliances that can foster Nigeria national unity. He argued that social and political actions that can engender political cleavages along nationalistic lines of trade, education, profession and production were neglected. Rather, ethno-religious chauvinistic interests provided the political framework through which political elite achieved their political and economic objective. Agbaje opined that 'communalisation of public life' was an observable trend in Nigerian post- independence Nigeria. He argued that elite and non-elite desire to use primordial ties, regional/state imbalance within the context of Nigerian federalism and tendency to identify with ethno-national and political cleavages to secure advantages, patronages and privileges are the principal reasons for 'communalisation of public life' prevalent in Nigeria political space.

The twin tradition of authoritarianism is and brinkmanship has pointed Nigeria's political history along the path of ethno-regional chauvinism and the promotion of ethnic agendas, ethnic spokespersons, and ethnic structures and institutions have been reduced or are perceived as facultative symbols in the recurring calculus of geo-ethnic and other sectional balances (or imbalances) of power. Thus, crises get reduced easily to a combat of sectional pride, often difficult to assuage without raising stakes and tempers

up to the brink, with the ever-present possibility of in fact going over the brink. At the heart of the country's authoritarian tradition is the fear of incipient internal colonialism and domination. Right or wrong, important sections of the country continue to express fears of domination or marginalisation-political, economic, religious- which grow in geometric proportion in the inclement weather of authoritarianism which breeds and encourage insensitive leadership(Agbaje,2007,p.33).

Agbaje concluded that the seed of existence and sustenance of ethnic militias in Nigeria germinated from the parochial attitude of the political elite that could not contemplate and situate their political and economic interests within the broad framework of nationalistic political agenda that does offer unfair advantage(s) to sectional interests.

Anifowose pioneer studies on *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience* provided conceptual and theoretical framework for comprehending violence as a tool of political power (Anifowose,2006) Anifowose made conceptual clarification on the difference between 'violence' and 'force'(Anifowose,2006; 3) . For him, violence is ' *a catch all for every variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing which a given observer happens to fear or condemn*' while force means *legal and legitimate use of violence by a government for the protection of the state... violence is interpreted as illegal and illegitimate acts carried out by non-governmental individuals and groups*. He argued that there is increasing awareness among behavioural scholars particularly political scientists that violence and other forms of civil disorder are associated with political interaction and exercise of power within the context of competing interests in political space.

Using established theoretical frameworks in Political Science, Anifowose contended that Political violence may be grouped into three distinct but mutually complementary models(Anifowose,2006,p. 5) These are:

- (a) The relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration-aggression hypotheses.
- (b) The systemic hypothesis; and
- (c) The group conflict hypothesis

Anifowose adopted these identified theoretical templates to study incidents of violence in the political process of Tiv and Yorubaland with emphasis on pre and post independent Nigeria. He concluded that:

Nigeria's experience from independence to date, illustrate that those who govern put high premium on the acquisition and the retention of power, hence their political intolerance, unbridled partisanship, political and electoral corruption, disregard for constitutionalism, the rule of law, transparency and accountability. The consequences are disillusionment and frustration on the party of the discounted and the resultant manifestation of violent behaviour against the state and its symbol of authority. Where there is political intolerance on the part of the agents of the state, manifested in ruthlessness and oppression

of the opposition, violence seems to be the immediate option
(Anifowose, 2006, p. xiii) .

Peterside article on the military and internal security in Nigeria (Peterside, 2014) drew inspirations from Azinge work (Azinge, 2013). The author traced the involvement of the Nigeria military in internal security operations to the colonial epoch of the Nigerian history. Peterside essentially concentrated on the post 1999 Nigeria internal crisis particularly the ones engendered the non-state militant groups such as MASSOB, MEND and BOKO HARAM. She contended that the imperatives of ethno-religious crisis and crimes of armed robbery, kidnapping and ritual killings in Nigeria made military involvement indispensable in the internal security operations of Nigeria in the future. She therefore identified five basic issues that the military institutions must address for efficacious ISOPs. These are: re-orientation of the military; training; equipment; strategies and tactics; and the mode of operation of the military during internal security operations.

Omede seminal work-*The Nigerian Military: Analysing Fifty Years of Defence and Internal Military and Fifty Years of Internal Security Operations in Nigeria (1960-2010)* (Omede, 2012) provided historical and conceptual framework for interrogation of the specific experience of the Nigerian state in security issues and events. For Omede, Nigeria national security has two focal points- state security and human security. He posited:

the security of a nation is predicated on two central pillars. On one hand, it entails the maintenance and protection of the socio-economic order in the face of internal and external threat. On the other, it entails the promotion of a preferred international order, which minimize the threat to core values and interests, as well as to the domestic order. The preoccupation with national security in this regard therefore, often and always creates an apprehension over security that tends to generate military activity regardless of the nature of threats (Omede, 2012, p. 294)

Of particular interest to this study is Omede historical insight into the impact of non-state militant organizations on Nigeria internal security. He traced the genesis of non-state militant organizations in Nigeria to January 1966 when Isaac Boro established the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) to articulate and defend the interests of minority ethnic groups against the perceived marginalization orchestrated by the dominant Igbo ethnic group in the defunct Eastern Region of Nigeria. Subsequent non-state militant organizations after NDVF activities in Nigeria and the decisive military interventions to mitigate ensuing political and socio-economic crisis equally received scholarly attention of the erudite scholar.

Egbefo and Salihu discourse on *‘Internal Security Crisis in Nigeria: Causes, Types, Effects and Solutions’* provided useful paradigm for understanding the dynamics of internal security in Nigeria. The study started from the premise that *‘a society without security threat is a dead society since security crisis is a reality of human existence and therefore a means of understanding social behavior’*. For the authors, internal security can be construed as:

the totality of the nation’s equilibrium state which must be maintained to enhance the state performance of its responsibility without unnecessary

interruptions from anywhere. Internal security involves government coordination of all those actions that would guarantee that the equilibrium of state is constantly maintained or quickly brought to normal whenever it is threatened by any form of civil disturbances or distractions from students, political or religious groups (Egbefo,& Salihu, 2014, p.180)

The study which essentially used political-economy theoretical framework traced the genesis of threats to Nigeria internal security to competition within and between various interests (ethno-religious, social classes) for the control of the very limited resources of Nigeria. This competition is further aggravated by the global economic environment which is hostile to Nigeria economic interests as Nigeria has very limited control in determining price structure of her exports and imports. This is further compounded by leadership and governance challenges of the Nigerian state. Egbefo and Salihu identified basic issues that constituted threats to Nigeria internal security to include: Controversial Census: Inter-Ethnic Rivalry; Revenue Allocation; National Conference; Federal Character; Nigerian leadership that is grafted on ethnic loyalty; Wrong use of Security Agencies; Existence of Political Militias: Monetization of the Political Process which restricted political participation particularly at the highest levels to only those who can afford it.

NON STATE MILITANT GROUPS IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

The nature of the Nigerian state that emanated from the British inspired amalgamation in 1914 induced competitions for resources between various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Nigerian state was created by the British colonial government principally for the administration and economic efficacy. According to Chick (1965,p.79) and Alabi, (2018,p.45) this was further aggravated by British colonial policies of indirect rule, regionalism, arbitrary political policies that tended to emphasize ethno-religious divisions in the Nigerian state. Consequently, the colonial policies created ethnic nationalism in Nigerian. Indeed, Nnoli contended that ethnic identity was a colonial creation (Nnoli,1978, 55) . According to Nnoli the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa ethnic national identity were created during colonial epoch in Nigeria. He posited:

It was only after colonisation that the term Yorubaland began to be used to refer to the domains of all rulers who claim descent from the mythical Oduduwa, instead of the kingdom of Oyo to which it was previously limited...many times the various Igbo pre-colonial polities did not make any contact whatsoever before colonisation, and were even in certain cases oblivious of the existence of one another. In fact, the Igbo speaking people were self- consciously divided into the Olu and the Igbo peoples. Even today the Olu are very reluctant, except sometimes in the urban centres, to refer to themselves as Igbo(Nnoli,1978,pp. 35-36)

The colonial economy introduced new dimension into conscious development of ethnic identity within colonial Nigeria as a result of the competition for resources within and between ethnic divides in Nigeria. The introduction of formal western education and white- collar jobs which were mainly found in urban centres in Nigeria encouraged migrations from rural areas. New migrants sought help

from people of their ethnic origin(s). This development further reinforced ethnic nationality identities. Ethnic and town unions were formed at different urban centres of Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano and Enugu among others. This ethnic identity later manifested in ethnicization of politics. By 1966, the Nigerian political space had been ethnicized substantially. According to Margaret Peil (1976,p.100) as at 1966, there were eighty-one political parties in Nigeria.

These political parties essentially represented different ethnic nationality interests. In other words, the competition between ethnic nationals in Nigeria had become intense and violent (Ake,1988,p.120). It was this violent competition for resources control that facilitated the first military coup de' tat in Nigeria on January 15, 1966 (Ademoyega, 1981, p.1). The existence of ,non-state militant group in Nigeria had origin in this historical colonial antecedent. According to Odia Ofeimun, the first post-independence non-state militant group in Nigeria known as *Dan Mahaukata* (son of madmen) was formed in 1964 by Aminu Kano led Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) to resist the perceived political repression purportedly perpetuated by the then ruling political party- Northern People's Congress political thugs. Subsequently, non-state militant groups became a prominent feature in post-independence Nigeria political space (Ofeimun, 2020). Prominent non-state militant groups are discussed underneath.

THE MOVEMENT FOR THE ACTUALIZATION OF SOVEREIGN STATE OF BIAFRA (MASSOB)

The Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is a peculiar non-state militant group . The peculiarity of MASSOB lies in the historical circumstances of its establishment. Hitherto, most non-state militant groups that emerged in Nigeria were products of objective reality of the socio-economic and political marginalisation that threatened the quality of life of the aggrieved facilitators of the non-state militant groups. For instance ,MEND and MOSOP were consequences of devastating environmental degradation caused by indiscriminate oil exploration and pollution that hampered the Niger Delta peoples' ability to engage in meaningful economic enterprise (Maier, 2002,p.143) without commensurate Nigerian government response to ameliorate the economic challenge. The OPC emergence is intricately linked to a historical period of perceived political marginalization and prosecution occasioned the annulment of the June 12,1993 Presidential election in Nigeria .

The peculiarity of MASSOB stemmed from the fact that it was the first non-state militant organization established without overt or covert state persecution by the Nigerian state. True, the Nigerian Civil War had devastating consequences on the Igbo population and business in Nigeria. But the proactive post-war reconstruction and reintegration policy introduced by the General Yakubu Gowon regime (Ineke, 2018, p.33) coupled with the enterprising spirit of the Igbo people ensured that the Igbo people were not just integrated back into political and economic life of the Nigerian state, but more importantly, the Igbos were playing dominance roles in the Nigerian banks (including the Central Bank of Nigeria) witnessed the Igbo playing major leadership roles in the political space ,as early as 1979 precisely nine years after the end of the civil war , an Igbo man, Chief Alex Ekwueme was elected the Vice President of Nigeria on August 17, 1979 (Ojiako, 1983,p.24).

MASSOB was the first non-state militant organization established outside the geographical area of [south eastern Nigeria] whose interest it claimed to represent. MASSOB was first established in Lagos, South-western Nigeria by an Indian trained Lawyer (Chief Ralph Umazuruike) who then resided in Lagos. Indeed, MASSOB erected first Biafran flag in Lagos before Chief Gani Adams



told Chief Umazuruike that the Yorubas have nothing against MASSOB agenda but that it is improper to turn Yorubaland to battle field for an agitation that is essentially an Igbo agenda. It was this firm opposition that made Chief Ralph Umazuruike to shift the headquarters of MASSOB from Lagos to Okwe of Okigewe District of Imo State .

Equally, MASSOB was the first non-state militant institution group in Nigeria that was established in Nigeria by urban elite that had to use force to compel people whose interests MASSOB was purportedly defending to obey its orders and directives. Other non-state militants groups (OPC, MOSOP, MEND ,etc) established the military wing essentially as an instrument to defend the groups against Nigerian state military activities to suppress their activities and also in rare cases militarily attack people who collaborated with Nigerian state against their perceived interests and agenda . Militant group forced people to comply with her order. Sometimes, people are molested for non-compliance with their order (Chukindi, 2019).

Another peculiarity of MASSOB is that it is arguably the only non-state militant group to create a currency and international passport at enormous economic exploitation of people that it purportedly represented. In 2005, the Biafran currency was introduced by MAASOB and the Igbos were encouraged to change Nigerian currency for ‘valueless’ Biafran currency. Again, in 2009 MASSOB introduced Biafra international passport to great economic benefit of MASSOB leadership and at the expense of the Igbo people it purportedly represented.

To be sure, MASSOB was established in 1999 by Igbo urban elite to mobilize the Igbos for the establishment of the Biafran nation-state. By definition, this Biafran state encompassed the defunct Eastern Region of Nigeria. The minorities in the old Eastern Region disassociated themselves from any action to make them part of the Biafran state. The MASSOB establishment might have been inspired by the relative success of OPC. As a result of different agitation and actions of OPC and other Yoruba groups between 1994 and 1999, there was an unprecedented historical occurrence. The Nigerian political elite conceded the Presidency of the Nigerian state to the Yorubas in 1999. Thus by concession, only candidates of Yoruba origin (Chief Olu Falae of Alliance for Democracy and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of People Democratic Party) contested the 1999 presidential election in Nigeria. The Igbos that had not established any exclusive political group since the end of Nigerian Civil War in 1970, suddenly MASSOB became the spring board for agitation of the Igbos against perceived political marginalization by the Nigerian state.

Consequently, MASSOB activities became perceived by the Nigerian state as treasonable and the leadership of MASSOB were arrested tried and imprisoned at different times. By 2009, the MASSOB had established a Radio Biafra to propagate its secession agenda. By 2012, there were disenchantments within the MASSOB leadership. This led to fractionalization of MASSOB. Chief Uwazukurike leadership was accused of integrating himself into the mainstream of the Nigerian politics. This was the time that Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was the President of Nigeria and the key positions in government (Federal Ministries of Finance and Petroleum) were controlled by the Igbos. Subsequently, a new faction of MASSOB known as Biafra Zionist front (BZF) under the leadership of Benjamin Igwe Onwuka emerged. The BZF in 2012 momentarily occupied the Enugu Radio and Government House but they were rooted out of it within few hours. In 2014, Nnamidi Kanu who had gained prominence through the Radio Biafra broadcast established another faction from MASSOB known as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Incidentally, Nnamidi Kanu campaigned for re-election of Jonathan. Shortly, after President Jonathan Goodluck lost the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, IPOB activities became more pronounced and more anti-Nigerian state. On September 20, 2017, IPOB was declared a terrorist organisation under the Terrorism Acts



of the Nigeria Law by Justice Abdu Kifarati of Federal High Court, Abuja. Thus, IPOB is the first non-state militant organisation to be declared a terrorist organization by a court of competent jurisdiction in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

What is quite apparent from Nigeria political history is that the structural arrangement of the Nigerian state which concentrated economic and political power at the centre tended to create a perception (real or imagined) that any nationality/ethnic group that controls the centre will ultimately monopolize national resources for exclusive use for her ethnic interest(s) and consequently all other ethnic groups are marginalized. Hence, the struggle for political control of the central government becomes acrimonious. One of the manifestations of the acrimony associated with contest for power at the centre in Nigeria is the upsurge in formation of ethnic non-state militant groups like MASSOB and IPOB.

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