

VOLUME 14 NUMBER 4 DECEMBER 2012



# NATIONAL *Identities*



Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN 1460-8944

Covenant University  
Ota

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## Resurgent ethno-nationalism and the renewed demand for Biafra in south-east Nigeria

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The renewed demand for Biafra by Igbo people is a rejection of their post-war socio-political and economic condition in Nigeria. Through the processing of primary data, the paper examines this reinvention of Igbo nationalism. It looks at its linkage with the 1999 democratic transition in Nigeria, its implications and management by the government. The paper concludes that the renewed demand for Biafra is caused by perception of inequities and injustice in the distribution of power and resources among the Igbo. Hence a deliberate effort to correct these social problems can assuage ethnic tensions and presumption of political violence in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Biafra; Igbo nationalism; Nigerian politics; social inequities; ethnicity

### Background

The renewed quest for an independent state of Biafra dates back to late 1960s. Biafra was first declared an independent state by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu on 30 May 1967, following the resolutions of the joint session of the Advisory Committee of Chiefs, Elders and the Consultative Assembly of the Representative of the People of Eastern Nigeria (Okonkwo, 2006). This had followed a breakdown of negotiation to restore normalcy after a July 1966 counte-coup, spearheaded by Nigerian army officers of northern extraction, triggered massive killing of easterners in the north. The subsequent influx of easterners back to their region of origin for safety, created a refugee problem for the eastern regional government. These, coupled with discovery of oil in the region, made the push for secession very attractive (Fearon & Laitin, 2006).

The politics of Nigeria's decolonization had aroused ethnic consciousness that manifested in various forms leading to independence in 1960. The major political parties were formed along ethnic lines and ethnic sentiment was the major political tool deployed to capture political power, in the process generating varying inter-ethnic conflicts. The spillover of this inter-ethnic political strife was what culminated in the declaration of the republic of Biafra in 1967.

For a better understanding of the genesis of that declaration, it is imperative to highlight graphic details of the events that led to it. According to Nixon (1972), the Biafran claim to independence began in May 1966, after series of attacks targeted against peoples of the former eastern region living in northern Nigeria. The attacks were followed by the counter-coup of 29 July 1966, during which Nigerian troops of

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northern origin systematically killed about 240 southern officers and men, of whom at least three-quarters were easterners. The coupists were reacting against an earlier coup in January 1966 led by five majors of the Nigerian army that hailed from the eastern part of the country, in which the prime minister Tafawa Balewa and premier of the northern region Ahmadu Bello were killed, while the president NnadiAzikiwe and Michael Okpara, premier of the eastern region, were spared. Although the coup failed, the politicians decided to hand over power to the military and the mantle fell on General Aguiyi Ironsi, who was of Igbo extraction. His inability to bring the coupists to justice and promulgation of a decree that abolished Nigeria's federalism have been cited as reasons behind the counter-coup that led to his death and subsequent replacement with Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon from the north. This action, according to Nixon (1972), destroyed the Nigerian army as an effective agent for Nigerian unity, as well as the unity of military command structure as manifested in the non-recognition of Lieutenant-Colonel Gowon as the rightful person to assume the position of supreme commander by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, who was then military governor of the eastern region. Ojukwu had insisted that Brigadier Ogundipe, a southerner from the Yoruba ethnic group, should have assumed that position as the most senior army officer, instead of Gowon.

The dispute generated by the counter-coup lingered until September 1966 when another systematic massacre of easterners living in the north led to the mass migration back to the east, thus widening the crack in national unity. This threw into the national burner issues such as problems with refugees and economic support of displaced persons. The intensified fears of easterners for their personal safety and the belief that the central government cannot guarantee such, combined to escalate the tension between the eastern region and central governments.

Nixon (1972) noted that none of the series of efforts to find peaceful basis for renewed cooperation between the eastern regional and central governments yielded little fruit, but rather series of unilateral moves in areas of economic and political relations by both governments worsened the conflict until the eastern regional government declared Biafra republic.

In a bid to stop the secession, the central government, commenced what was tagged a police action against the new republic of Biafra on 5 July 1967. That action, meant to last for just a few weeks, was prolonged for almost three years until 15 January 1970, when the resistance by the Biafran rebels caved in, leading to victory for the unity of Nigeria. The victory created the condition for the re-absorption of the Biafrans into Nigeria, thus completely ending the quest for Biafra republic, which became a forgotten matter retained only in the minds of those who were witnesses. The re-absorption of Biafrans came with declaration by the victorious federal military government of 'no victor, no vanquished'. However, some commentators had argued that post-war events in Nigeria indicated otherwise for the former Biafrans, particularly the dominant Igbo ethnic group, whom they argued were re-absorbed into Nigeria as conquered people (Amadiume, 2000; Ikpeze, 2000).

That argument justified the perception of many Igbo people that they were re-absorbed as second-class citizens, hence the cries of marginalization and agitations for it to end. Onu (2001) argues that the resurgence of Igbo nationalism, which is currently spearheaded by the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), a dominantly youthful and radical organization, is a result of their frustration in the Nigerian entity. Ikpeze (2000), in an attempt to establish the

marginalization of the Igbo in post-war Nigeria, articulated four clear dimensions for marginalization of the Igbo, which have manifested to include economic strangulation, politico-bureaucratic emasculation, military neutralization and ostracism.

Some of the issues he articulated to prove the marginalization of the Igbo, include the 20 pounds ceiling placed on bank lodgements for every Igbo after the war, notwithstanding how much such person had in a bank. This action has been interpreted as a calculated policy to neutralize the savings and capacity of the Igbo in order to rehabilitate and re-integrate into the Nigerian economy (Ikpeze, 2000; Ojukwu, 2005). Related to this is the sudden withdrawal of federal troops stationed in the east, a ploy that was aimed at denying the Igbo economy the stimulus for recovery, as Igbo people who could have been empowered as suppliers to the troops were denied the opportunity (Ikpeze, 2000). The timing of the indigenization policy, a programme enacted by the military administration of General Gowon, transferring significant shares of fully owned foreign companies operating in Nigeria to the Nigerian people shortly after the war when the Igbo were financially constrained to participate, incapacitated the Igbo economically (Ikpeze, 2000). The implication of this was the inability of the Igbo to form an Igbo-based national party in the mould of the first republic National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) in post-war transition to civil rule programmes that can compete favourably with other parties that are dominantly Yoruba or Hausa-Fulani.

Complaint of deficient infrastructural development in Igbo land, which is said to be the cause of mass migration of Igbo people to other areas of the country for economic survival, has also been mentioned. Also of note are cases of discrimination against the Igbo in the location of industries initiated by the federal government and the attendant loss of benefits of linkages. The deliberate neglect of ecological problems in the east, especially the problem of soil erosion, end up in the loss of agricultural lands and settlements, has also been mentioned. Ecological devastation in Igbo land becomes obvious in relative terms when compared with the massive attention given to desertification in the north and beach erosion in the western parts of Nigeria by the federal government (Ikpeze, 2000, p. 98).

Apart from these economically disempowering policies, other instruments were also used to effectively exclude the Igbo from economic and political power. Such include the 'tokenist' appointments to strategically insignificant positions under military administrations, marginal presence in the administrative and headship of federal ministerial and extra-ministerial departments and parastatals. Another important issue that is often cited is the distortions of the federal structure to the disadvantage of the Igbo. Also that the Igbo have the least number of states and local governments compared to the other geo-political zones in the country. The implication of this is the smaller resources that accrue to Igbo states from the centre and insignificant representation in federal institutions such as the National Assembly, where number of states and local government areas is a determining factor.

Furthermore, the indifferent response of the federal authorities and even governments of non-Igbo states to uphold the constitutionally inviolable natural residency and citizenship rights of original Igbo owners, as far as the issue of 'abandoned property' of the Igbo who fled the mass killings and war, is also mentioned (Ikpeze, 2000). This issue was more pronounced in post-war Port Harcourt, where Igbo landlords who fled the war came back to find people occupying their property, with the government doing nothing to help them regain

their properties. Aware of the role Nigerian military officers of Igbo extraction played in the Biafran armed forces, there was a policy to ensure under-representation of the Igbo in the post-war military establishments (Ikpeze, 2000). For instance, re-absorption of military men and women of Igbo extraction after the war was negligible, for the few that were re-absorbed, rate of upward mobility were very slow to prevent resurgence of the Igbo militarily. Related to this is the virtual exclusion of Igbo land from highest sensitive military facilities and installation such as mechanized division or armouries (Ikpeze, 2000).

For close to 30 years in post-war Nigeria, the major preoccupation of the Igbo was how to end their marginalization and fully re-integrate into the Nigerian society and possibly attain the pre-eminent pre-war position of a power bloc (Igbokwe, 2005). All through the period of military rule, up to the 1990s, there were no recognizable groups agitating for resuscitation of Biafra republic publicly as major public discourse centred on how the Igbo could be reintegrated back fully into the Nigerian political process. But the democratic transition that ushered in democracy in May 1999 opened the space for a new expression of Igbo ethno-nationalism, as manifested in the renewed demand for an independent Biafra republic.

Some pertinent questions arising from the discourse above are: why is there a renewed demand for Biafra, 30 years after a similar move was crushed? Who are the people behind the organizations spearheading this demand? How much do they know about the war that was fought in the past and what are the impacts of memories of the civil war in this renewed demand for Biafra? Does this renewed agitation have solid social bases or is it a ploy by Igbo elites to achieve greater stake in Nigerian politics? The answers to these questions form the major thrust of the subsequent discussion.

### Methodology

This paper draws on primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data are derived from fieldwork conducted in south-east Nigeria. Five focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Aba and Onitsha. These towns are the two major commercial centres in Igbo land, and serve as the heartbeats for the renewed demand for Biafra. Both are cosmopolitan cities, where Igbos of every dialect are found. Specifically, Aba was the city chosen by the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), to re-launch Biafra on 22 May 2000, and Onitsha is the most notorious in terms of violent activities in the quest for the actualization of Biafra. The FGD groups were homogenously male. The reason for this choice is found in Morgan (1997, p. 12) who had argued that young males spend most of their time interacting with other young males. The intention is for us to capture everyday social dynamics of opinion formation, as David and Sutton (2004) have observed that it helps in the study of consensus formation and pressure to conform to dominant group's expectation.

The other FGD was the elders group, which was conducted in Owerri. The reason for this choice is premised by the fact that Owerri is central geographically in Igbo land; it was where the battle of control was most intense during the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970. It was also in this town that the Biafran rebels surrendered to the Federal troops, which effectively ended the war. Our purpose for this is to gain the perspective of this category of Igbo population, who witnessed the civil war and

the consequences of that action. We also hope to get the impact of memories of the war on the current demand for Biafra. How did they relate stories of the war to their children and in what ways are their post-war experiences reflected in the present activities to actualize Biafra. The elders group was homogeneously male. The women group, which was also chosen in Owerri, comprised of women of varying ages. Our objective of constituting this group was to get the perspective and experiences of the women, who together with children are vulnerable during the conflict or violence that is often associated with ethno-nationalism. The last FGD was a mixed panel, made up of Nigerians from diverse ethnic backgrounds and diverse ages but dominantly youths. This group was constituted in Lagos. Lagos was chosen because it is the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria and the most cosmopolitan city where almost every ethnic group that makes up Nigeria is represented. A city with a large concentration of Igbo population, it was in Lagos that Chief Ralph Uwazurike and his band of MASSOB members started the campaign for the actualization of Biafra. The purpose for constituting this group is because the demand for Biafra has implications for the Igbo living outside of Igbo land, as well as other Nigerians. The intension was to gauge the views of other tribes and the Igbo outside of their homeland to this quest for Biafra. The numbers in these FGD panels were 10. The decision for this was anchored on Morgan (1997, p. 34) who suggested that, in the conduct of social research, groups of between six and 10 people work best.

Fieldwork data also included information from key informant interviews (KIIs) with some major players in the renewed demand for a Biafran state. Four MASSOB activists who hold important positions in the organization were interviewed. They include a leader of a group called 'Biafran Traditional Rulers', an administrator of a MASSOB district in Imo state and a member of the mobilization committee of the organization. Two top echelons in the organization, Chief Ralph Uwazurike the founder of the organization and Mr Benjamin Onuegbu co-coordinator of western zone, were also interviewed. As were the Director of State Security Service (SSS) in Imo state and the Police prosecution officer in Awka Anambra state, even though it was extremely difficult as these people were very cautious in volunteering information on the subject.

Two community leaders were also interviewed: the paramount ruler of Okwe community, where the leader of MASSOB, Chief Ralph Uwazurike hails from and where the Freedom House headquarters of the group is sited, and the paramount ruler of Owerri Eze, Emmanuel Njemanze, who revealed that he fought in the civil war on the Biafran side and whose uncle, then the paramount ruler, witnessed the surrender by the Biafran rebels. The traditional ruler was also chosen because his domain as the capital of Imo state has witnessed a fair share of violent activities attributed to groups demanding Biafra.

The interviews were of the one-off type and unstructured. The reason for this is for them to be more in-depth and also to allow the interviewees room to fully express themselves. As David and Sutton (2004, p. 87) have argued, the unstructured interview lets the interviewee tell their story and so determine to some extent the flow of the dialogue. This notwithstanding, the interviews revolved around the key theme as expressed in our research questions. The key informant interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed. Some were conducted in Igbo language and all translations were made by the principal researcher.

Apart from the data derived from the above-mentioned sources, the paper also relied heavily on secondary sources from literature surveys of books, reports by daily newspapers and magazines, and periodicals that were constantly updated. Conference papers, television programmes and the internet were also combined to provide materials used in the discussion of findings, which was presented in the narrative.

### **Theoretical perspective**

Primordialism, instrumentalism and social constructivism are the major ways of understanding nationalism manifestation or ethnicity. The primordialist perspective is connected with blood ties or kinship (Geertz, 1963). It assumes that a person's fundamental ethnic identity is fixed at birth and cannot change, therefore ethnicity is historically rooted and tied to geography or a particular homeland. It is this natural boundary that defines the traditional homeland of specific ethnic group (Joreman, 2003, p. 20). Primordialism therefore attempts to address the root of ethnic identity and the reasons for its tremendous strong pull in the lives of modern as well as ancient people. Nations are seen by primordialists as old, something that is rooted in both human biology and historical antiquity, therefore the likelihood of change of ethnic identification is slim.

The primordial analysis is in sharp contrast with social constructivism, which emphasizes the fluid nature of ethnic identification. It sees language, religion, physiology, etc. as creating the set of identities that one can choose, as reinforced by economic, political and social conditions. In other words, identity set is not adequate to explain ethnic identity unless reinforced by other material conditions. Therefore, nationalism is a combination of inborn trait and social inputs, which are impacted by experiences. In this sense, identity can be constructed, making group boundaries changeable (Nagel, 1986). The emphasis of social constructivism that people can have multiply ascribed identities, dismisses the primordialism notion of existence of pre-determined groups. This point is further stressed by Anderson (1991), who contends that nations are imagined communities where membership is contingent upon perception of people.

Instrumentalism, which this paper adopts, is different from both primordialism and social constructivism. Whereas primordialism stresses the enduring ties of ethnic groups, instrumentalism stresses malleability of ethnic sentiments that depends on circumstance and the choice of the individual. This is also different from social constructivism because this choice is not hinged on the rational calculation of the individual as stressed by social constructivism but through manipulation via ethnic sentiments.

The theory of political instrumentalism attributes the outbreak of inter-group conflict to ethnic entrepreneurs who capitalize on the availability of ethnic networks to mobilize masses along ethnic lines (Cohen, 1996). This especially occurs when political elites are in danger of being 'ethnically outbid' by extremists or when domestic or international challenges threaten their political survival and interests. Instrumentalism views ethnicity as the means to some specific political end when identity is circumstantially played up (Joireman, 2003, p. 35). Instrumentalism therefore stresses malleability of individuals through the whipping up of ethnic sentiments. The instrumentalism perspective to the study of ethnicity posits that

ethnic identities are important because of the circumstances or the role of elites in manipulating identity. Ethnicity disappears once its utility is no longer required. This simply shows that ethnicity is both pervasive and deeply rooted because it is politically useful.

The role of leadership is vital in the mobilization of people towards ethnic identification to actualize a political goal. Esman (1977) noted that this role is provided by mainly educated people in ethnic movements, as shown in some Western societies. These people constitute themselves as alternative elite groups to challenge the dominant elite using ethnic sentiments. In the same vein, Brass (1991), whose work is based on Indian politics, posited that ethnic identities in a complex society as India are fluid and often conflictual because of the role played by the elites who were not accommodated in leadership positions.

The instrumentalism perspective is, however, inadequate to explain ethnic identification that exists without any definable political goal either for a particular individual or elite, especially where people affirm that they hold a particular ethnic identification because it gives them a sense of belonging. Instrumentalism perspective inadequacy comes to the fore due to the inability to explain the persistence of ethnic groups across time, more so when changes in political agendas and goals are not reflected in changing ethnic identification. Another area of inadequacy of instrumentalism is its inability to explain situations where leadership arises to follow the will of the masses.

However, these shortcomings notwithstanding, the theory of instrumentalism addresses the core of the subject matter of this study, which is ethno-nationalism and a renewed demand for Biafra. It addresses the issue of why violently oriented ethnic organizations such as MASSOB are emerging in Nigeria. Because instrumentalism views the mobilization of ethnicity to accomplish a political end and given the roles certain actors at the leadership apex of MASSOB played in giving birth and nurturing of the the organizations, this choice becomes faultless.

To instrumentalists, elites who desire some roles that have eluded them in a heterogeneous political system, manipulate ethnicity to achieve mobilization for their personal aggrandizement (Cohen, 1996; Brass, 1991; Hechter, 2000). It emphasizes the goals of the ethnic group and that identity is circumstantially played up (Joireman, 2003, p. 35). Instrumentalism stresses the malleability of ethnic sentiments that depends on circumstance and the choice of the individuals. There is acknowledgement of the importance of objective markers such as symbols, customs, language and appearance, but emphasis is on behaviour, meaning that an individual ethnic identity can be determined by the examinations of his actions and choices. This simply shows that ethnicity is both pervasive and deeply rooted because it is politically useful. To instrumentalists the role of leadership is very vital in the mobilization of people towards ethnic identification to actualize political goals.

Those individuals who spearhead group action in the name of ethnicity have a choice to make and this is only done when they are convinced that personal benefit outweighs costs. For these elites, choice, sentiments and the actions engendered by their manipulation of ethnic identities ceases when it is no longer politically expedient. In other words, those dividing lines between peoples on the basis of ethnicity become blurred when there is no opportunity for advancing parochial elite interests clouded as a group cause. This theory sufficiently explains the role of Ralph Uwazurike whose founding MASSOB that kick-started the renewed call for Biafra

had interacted with key political actors in Nigeria and was a major player in the Nigerian political process (Oti, 2007, p. 7). His frustration came to the fore as a fallout of power equation and configuration after transitional elections. As a strong member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and active in the Obasanjo campaign committee, Uwazurike expected compensation from the victor. Prior to that, he has been the leader of Igbo Council of Chief, a Lagos-based social club that is exclusively Igbo.

It is not on record that Uwazurike was compensated by the victorious PDP government in terms of appointment or contract, and so cashing in on the disappointment of many Igbo on the failure of aspirants of Igbo extraction in both the PDP and All Peoples Party (APP), to capture the residential tickets MASSOB was formed as a way of expressing dissent. The initial appointments made by the new administration, that Uwazurike perceived as not redressing the long-time complaints of the Igbo, had Uwazurike on hand to help. Those conditions made it easier to mobilize the Igbo given the general cry of marginalization by them.

### *Democracy and the renewed demand for Biafra in Nigeria*

The transition to civilian rule in 1999, following the exit of the military from politics, widened the hitherto close political space in Nigeria, thus given rise to the renewed demand for Biafra (Duruji, 2010). Whereas the imperative of security of the Igbo people informed the declaration of the Republic of Biafra in 1967: this new agitation for Biafra has to do with perceived marginalization of the Igbo since the end of the civil war.

The transition to democracy, according to the responses from the focus group interviews, provided the condition for emergence of government that is accountable, because mandates are obtained from the people, as such the government is obligated to address issues that concern the people and, in the case of the Igbo, redressing the perceived marginalization (FGD, 2007). Following this belief, the Igbo enthusiastically participated in all the opportunities provided in Nigeria during the processes of democratization as a way of integrating fully into the Nigerian society as equal partners with the other ethnic groups. The Igbo were particularly enthusiastic in the political transition that ushered in the fourth republic, in Nigeria in 1999, because, to them, the opportunity of the openness and freedom that democracy offers would lead to de-marginalization of the group (Uwazurike, 2008). Chief Ralph Uwazurike, the founder of MASSOB, as one of such optimists, was a member of the Obasanjo presidential campaign organization and worked with others to see him elected on the platform of the PDP (Oti, 2007) According to Uwazurike, he expected recognition of the contribution of Igbos to Obasanjo's victory by way of juicy appointments for his ethnic group (Ajayi & Duruji, 2008). However, the initial actions of the newly elected government in appointments failed to meet his expectations. The failure of the new president to appoint an Igbo in any of the security agencies of the state was the catalyst he needed to commence a long-held life ambition to actualize Biafra (Uwazurike, 2005, 2008).

To Uwazurike, therefore, MASSOB was formed because of his convictions, which included what he calls assault on the psyche of the Igbo after the war, in the manner of distribution of federal appointments and projects, and that Igbo people has remained easy targets for riots and disturbances in many parts of country

(Uwazurike, 2005, 2008). The feeling of alienation and marginalization is indeed very strong and constituted the bedrock that sustains the resurgent demand for Biafra as Onuegbu explains thus,

MASSOB started 13 September, 1999 and our leader saw a dream of liberating his people, the oppressed people of eastern Nigeria. They are slaves because nothing in Nigeria benefits the easterner, no development in the area, they are hardly employed into federal establishments and even when it occurs they are not promoted. Go to the east, you cannot see government presence especially in Igbo land. In the scheme of things we are not regarded. Another thing again is that every year, you hear that the northerners are using us as sacrifice, killing us en mass. Even in the west Igbos are killed every year. These massacres have been happening from time to time and when we are crying, no government listens to us because of that, the Igbo rallied round Ralph Uwazurike, who came out to say enough is enough. (Onuegbu, 2008)

The issues of marginalization as the major cause for the renewed call for Biafra resonated frequently in many interview responses and the FGD, but Eze Njemanze brought it out lucidly. First he stated that the recent agitation for Biafra was not similar to those of 1967–1970 when a state called Biafra existed in its true sense. He argued that the war that occurred at that time was an accident of time which ought not to have happened if Nigerians has had the understanding prevalent in present-day Nigeria (Njemanze, 2007). His argument is anchored on the fact that present-day Nigerians seem to have resolved individually and collectively to live together, notwithstanding provocations that would have led to a repeat of the event of 1967–1970. To him the manner of the Biafran surrender, which was far from a negotiated settlement, and the perception held by the federal military government as victors contributed significantly to shaping the dynamics of post-war Nigeria that consequently created conditions for the renewed demand for Biafra. He speaks thus:

if the Nigerians of that time were as civilized, educated and broadminded as those of today; if the Nigerians of today who feel for oneness were in the 1960's and feel the need to be together and have respect for each other as we have today, there would not have been a shooting war, because a lot of things have happened that could have triggered a similar situation but somehow, these things had been resolved. If the former Biafrans, who are now Nigerians and the other Nigerians, had embraced each other, there would not have been any need for this recent development. (Njemanze, 2007)

Impliedly the absence of dialogue, which is an important element that accompanies the end of a war, may have created the room for this renewed agitation for Biafra. According to Njemanze, dialogue as an instrument would have brought together the belligerents to a discussion table where salient issues on how former combatants and enemies are to co-habit could be negotiated and agreed amicably. For instance, the issue of what to do with the combatants on the side of Biafra did not take place, as is the practice the world over where conflicts of that magnitude have occurred (Njemanze, 2007). That opportunity was lost when the meeting scheduled at Lisbon, where a third party could have mediated conditional surrender for the Biafran rebels, failed to hold (Njemanze, 2007). The point argued here is that the surrender of Biafra happened suddenly when the federal troops became stronger than they were for most of the war (Odogwu, 1985). As such, the article of surrender, which was signed by the leaders of Biafra, was a one-sided affair that created the

imbalance which reflected soon after the war and manifested in the marginalization of Igbo people in Nigeria.

The imbalance situation emanated out of bad faith on the part of the victorious federal government and their officials who took immediate actions that were not reconcilable with the avowed post-war objective of reconciliation (Njemanze, 2007). One of such action of bad faith was the dismissal from service of all Nigerian army officers who were above the rank of captain that fought on the Biafran side, those who ordinarily would have been reabsorbed into the army to ensure unity and prevent insurgency. The federal government policy on bank lodgements that limited entitlement of flat twenty pounds for former Biafrans who lodged money in the banks before the outbreak of the war notwithstanding the amount they had in banks was another action in bad faith done to kill the spirit of the people for their perceived support of the rebels (Njemanze, 2007). 'These actions make it seem to an observer that the war which Nigeria waged on Biafra was not fought to bring the Biafrans back as citizens but as hewers of wood and drawers of water' (Njemanze, 2007).

The 3R's (reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction), which General Gowon declared at the end of the war, aimed at integrating the former Biafrans into Nigeria, and rebuilt the war-affected zones in Igbo land, ended up as rhetoric. According to Eze Njemanze, it was only reconciliation that was achieved as events showed. He speaks thus:

Shortly after the war, ordinary Nigerians went about their normal lives and people who fled either from or to the war zone returned to where they fled from to continue their normal lives. However, rehabilitation was incomplete, people who fled to the war area abandoning their work and businesses were not rehabilitated, the combatants and wounded on the Biafran side were not rehabilitated, and even those who were dismissed from services were not rehabilitated. Again the reconstruction of the war affected zone in terms of infrastructure destroyed during the war was not rebuilt. The worst aspect of it is that the punishment for engaging in the war was not limited to the combatants but when properly analyzed was directed at the populace through the deliberate policies of marginalization and this fact is what has created the condition for the flowering of this recent phenomenon. (Njemanze, 2007)

Drawing from the aforementioned, it is therefore compelling to argue that the renewed demand for Biafra as spearheaded by MASSOB is related to the ways post-war affairs were handled. A strong argument in support of this view is the fact that elements in the military who fought Biafran rebels at the war front were eventually the elements that captured, controlled and monopolized levers of power in Nigeria for a long time. It is noteworthy that Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo, Mohammed Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sanni Abacha and Abdul salami Abubakar, who headed various military regimes in Nigeria, were combatants of the Federal side during the civil war. According to Eze Njemanze, they ran the affairs of the country with the bitter memories of their war-time experiences as reflected in some of the policies of marginalization targeted at the Igbo people who were in reality seen as losers that ought to be treated so (Njemanze, 2007). Where this became very obvious was within the military, where representation of the Igbo, especially at the top echelon, was very negligible and inconsequential, partly because of the dismissal of the former Nigerian officers of Igbo extraction that defected to

the Biafran army and the consequent lack of effective voice in the military councils that dominated Nigerian politics prior to 1999 (Njemanze, 2007).

Furthermore, Njemanze argued that the sustained unmitigated attacks on people of Igbo extraction contributed in fuelling the feeling that things would have been different had Biafra succeeded. Therefore when it became obvious that these ruling military classes were receding from power, it became easy to mobilize people to support the idea of Biafra again.

The success of Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), a militant group with roots in the Yoruba ethnic along with similar ethnic-based Yoruba groups that challenged the military over the annulment of 12 June presidential election, thus forcing the ruling elite in Nigeria to concede presidency to their ethnic group in 1999, may have made an impact on Uwazurike as an observer of the Nigerian political process. As a social pressure group, the OPC, in conjunction with other subtle organizations, succeeded in compelling the rest of the country to conceding the presidency to them in 1999 through sustained militant agitation and cry of injustice over the annulment of an election won by one of their sons, Moshood Abiola. Uwazurike, being a close watcher and participant in the process that closed the contest for the presidency to only Yorubas, felt that a greater Igbo militancy manifesting in the form of demand for Biafra, can also result into a similar concession in the future and finally remove the scar of the war by forcing governments at the centre to end those policies that marginalized the Igbo in post-war Nigerian political processes. The events leading to the 1998 elections buttress this point because retired General Obasanjo was brought fresh from the prisons to the PDP by military elements under the leadership of retired General Ibrahim Babangida and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who later became the vice president under Obasanjo, coordinated the civilian wing of this coalition. It was therefore a big upset when the former vice president Alex Ekwueme, an Igbo who was instrumental in the formation of that party and was expected to fly the ticket, was roundly defeated. His opponent in the election was another Yoruba man, Olu Falae of Alliance for Democracy (AD), who contested on the platform of the All Peoples Party (APP) after Ogbonnaya Onu an Igbo who won the presidential primaries of that party was unceremoniously replaced in a concocted alliance between the APP and AD.

Another important point that also supports the view of linkage of Biafran resurgence activities to the democratic transition that occurred in 1999, is the role of the courts under the democratic dispensation. Pronouncements and judgments of the courts have limited the capacity of the police and other security agencies of the state to repress dissent or curtail the activities of civil society groups. For instance, the police and State Security Services (SSSs), had clashed with MASSOB activists when the organization was holding rallies to sensitize the people of their mission in the early days of its formation. But unlike the era of the military when these bodies could get away with arbitrariness and contempt for the rule of law, such rascality has been curtailed by several court pronouncements. Issues such as unlawful detention have been reduced as arrested activists are promptly arraigned. Some of the cases that makes it to the courts, the judges have not found sufficient ground to grant prosecution prayers (Edike, 2007). A typical example is the April 2000 case in Lagos where prosecution was praying for the court to ban MASSOB from engaging in rallies, which the court refused to grant because it violates the rights of the activist to lawful protest and assembly.

*The social basis for the resurgence*

Findings from the study also showed that the renewed demand for Biafra is motivated by perception of injustice by Igbos. Responses from interviews and focus group discussion indicate that most of our respondents believe that oil, the main resource sustaining Nigeria, comes from the areas that constituted former Biafra. To them the actualization of Biafra would pay off economically as proceeds of the oil that were hitherto shared would be retained fully in the new republic.

Oil exploration introduced an entirely new element into the structure of the Nigerian state. According to Obi (2002), internal predatory elite saw it as blessing from above meant only to serve their parochial interests without recourse to the people, especially those from the communities where this oil is produced. It was in this light that fiscal centralization, which the country witnessed shortly after independence, was introduced. The need for the federal government to prosecute the civil war effectively and unite the country was the reason the administration of General Gowon gave for abolishing the derivation dominated fiscal structure that was negotiated during the colonial era. Fearon and Laitin (2006) had argued that the main cause of the Biafra–Nigeria war was oil. This view is given credence by president Obasanjo who has been quoted on many visits to the Niger Delta area that the war was fought to stop the Igbo from appropriating the oil resource in the area.

Many of our respondents therefore believe that Biafra would be a viable state when actualized. This viewpoint has generated support for the idea of an independent Biafra especially among the masses going by the responses from the FGDs. Connected to this is the perceived industrious nature of the Igbo, which was demonstrated during the civil war in production of technological feats that ensured the survival of Biafra for almost three years, notwithstanding the blockade by the Federal government of Nigeria (Ukaegbu, 2005).

The challenge that confronts the agitations for Biafra is the Niger Delta struggle which was premised on environmental degradation of the region due to oil exploration and the demand for resource control. This struggle was spearheaded by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni Peoples (MOSOP), which carried out a non-violent struggle in the 1990s. However, increasing militancy intensified in the region shortly after the 2003 general elections in Nigeria as armed militia groups under the umbrella of Movement for the Emancipation Niger Delta (MEND) through their activities created conditions of instability that negatively affected the Nigerian economy until the government of Umaru Musa YarAdua pacified them with an amnesty programme.

This notwithstanding, the innate ability of an ordinary Igbo man to survive in spite of odds as manifested in post-war rehabilitation, the success of numerous self-help projects undertaken by the people as a stop gap to government neglect, paints an image of a people with a high capacity for self-sustenance. This view widely held by many Igbo, as indicated from responses from our focus group discussants, fuels support for Biag based on viability of an independent state (FGD, 2007). This perception also came out strongly from the interactions with the MASSOB activists that were interviewed. The implication is that a Biafran state will provide opportunity for the people to realize their potentials, caged by the structure of the Nigerian state.

### *The role of memory*

Amadiume and An-Na'im (2000) had described Biafra as the first expression of massive suffering inflicted on society by an internal African war. Findings from our fieldwork indicate that memories of this suffering is certainly playing some role in the renewed demand for Biafra. For instance, the leader of MASSOB, Ralph Uwazurike, had said that what motivated him to start the new struggle to actualize Biafra was to avenge the death of his sister who died of *kwashiorkor*' (malnutrition) during the civil war, the cause of which he attributed to the food blockade used by the federal military government as a weapon of war against Biafra. He speaks thus 'I felt it was unjust and that if I grew up, I would come up with the Biafran issue again. So it was burning in my mind all through' (Uwazurike, 2008).

Another MASSOB activist, Chief Nwanka, recounted how his thriving transport business was ruined by the war and of his resolve never to restart it or any business until Biafra is actualized (Nwanka, 2007). This kind of experiences is shared by a significant number of Igbo people. For instance, some of the Biafran war veteran members of MASSOB were motivated to join the organization by the strong memories of the civil war and the suffering they were subjected to afterwards.

However, most of the respondents in the elders and women group of our focus group discussion, who experienced the civil war, were not in support of re-enactment of such bitter experiences again. The organization in another to appeal to these people propagates the philosophy of 'non-violence, on-exodus' as an approach to actualize their objectives.

### *Support for the demand for Biafra*

The signing of the article of surrender by General Philip Effiong ending the Nigerian-Biafran war on 13 January 1970 effectively ended the quest for an independent Biafra state. Until 1999, when Ralph Uwazurike formed MASSOB, there was no recognizable group agitating for actualization of Biafra. The formation of MASSOB seems to be the impetus other groups needed to rise from slumber. As at today, the number of groups demanding for the actualization of Biafra has multiplied, some of them splinter groups from MASSOB, whereas others are founded on a clean slate. These organizations include the Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups (COBLIG), Eastern People's Congress (EPC), Movement for Igbo Defence (MID), Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), Popular Front for the Development of Igboland (PFDIL), Biafra Liberation Group (BLG), Ohazurume Ndi Igbo (ONI), Eastern Solidarity Forum (ESF), Biafra Human Right (BHR) Germany, Ekwenche Ndi Igbo (ENI) USA, Biafra Must Be Society (BIAMUBS) and Biafran Actualization Forum (BAF) among others. These organizations by their activities have been able to arouse consciousness for Biafra, as most easterners have heard about the renewed demand for Biafra (Onu, 2001).

Findings from fieldwork interviews, discussions and literature survey, indicate that the renewed demand for Biafra, as spearheaded by MASSOB, has been well received by a significant population of Igbos. Although the organization that started its activities in Lagos, which was outside the territorial confines, was campaigning to realize was not taken seriously, it has succeeded in recruiting members that its leader claimed stand at 15 million (Onuegbu, 2008). Our focus

group respondents agree that the organization's posture of non-violent campaign which portrays MASSOB as a harmless organization has attracted sympathy. But when this notion is juxtaposed with the many clashes between the organization and security operatives, most of which have led to casualties, this image of a harmless, non-violent organization fades. However, activists spin away the image of a violent organization, but rather portray the organization as victims of state brutality as a way of attracting sympathizers (CWIS, 2006; Ajayi & Duruji, 2008). This strategy has won support for the organization as collaborated by Uwazurike in the following words:

the attack on MASSOB is the beauty of non-violence. If they do not attack us, the world would not hear about us. Do you know that if they had failed to attack MASSOB since 1999 when we started, we would have gone into oblivion? Our popularity soars because we are attacked on daily basis. So people started picking interest. And I tell you, the only good thing on earth is non-violence because that is the only means you can achieve your aim. Look at how much we have achieved in six years. But if we had resorted to arms, they would have finished us and the world would have looked the other way. Today MASSOB is all over the world. A Whiteman just left here. I don't know if you saw him. He came from Holland. He has been here close to two weeks waiting for this interview, staying in a hotel waiting for me. The first thing he told me, he said the beauty of what you are doing is non-violence. I left Nigeria to India and stayed 10 years studying non-violence. I know the rudiments. I know the potency. In non-violence you have nobody to defeat. (Uwazurike, 2008)

Another way by which MASSOB has generated widespread support for the renewed demand for Biafra is through its grassroots operation. The structure of MASSOB, which is 'grassroots' oriented, makes it easier for messages from the organization to be disseminated speedily and widely using the grassroots networks system. This partly accounts for the success of the group in shutting down the south east when it called for a sit-at-home on 26 August 2004 and September 2005 that was widely obeyed in spite of stiff opposition by the federal government and governors of Igbo state (Onuegbu, 2008).

The administrative system of MASSOB, which is depicted in Figure 1, has been significant in drawing popular support for the renewed demand for Biafra. It is imperative to explain this structure so as to understand the strategy this organization has used to draw popular support to the renewed demand for Biafra.

MASSOB has a close-knit hierarchical grassroots oriented organizational structure akin to shadow government in which upward mobility is based on commitment. This structure consists of the national, regions, area and provinces districts and wards. The national is made up of the apex leadership comprising officers of MASSOB who host regular national meetings on a monthly basis. Each state chapter takes turn to visit the Freedom headquarters of the group at Okwe near Okigwe in Imo state for these meetings (Onuegbu, 2008). The next level of authority is the regions which are headed by the Regional administrator, with a cabinet organized like the normal government ministerial structure. The regions comprise at least 10 areas and the areas headed by an area administrator who supervises at least 20 provinces. In between them is the Chief Provincial Administrator or zonal officer, who supervises 10 provisional officers. Under the province is the district. Ten districts

### MASSOB structure of administration

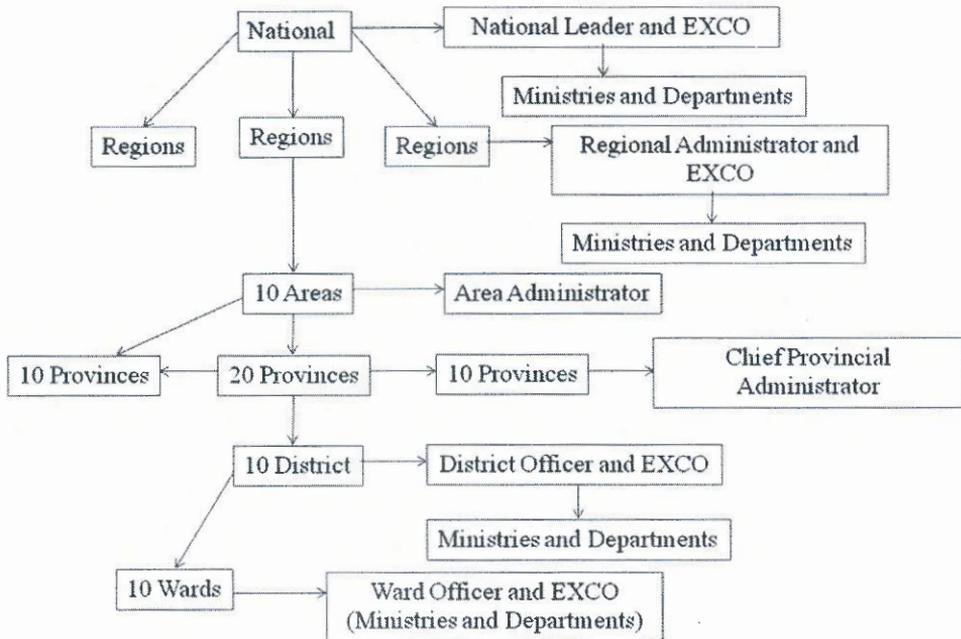


Figure 1. MASSOB's Structure of Administration.

make up a province and the districts are headed by district officers. Onuegbu explains the structure thus:

... in the beginning the structure is that we started with ward officers, after ward officers, you get district officers (DOs) after DOs ... Each PA has about ten DOs. If you come to that Area you may have between 20–30 PAs and each DO, they have many ward officers ... We started with them first, gathering people. After they may have stayed like two years or so, by which time they must have matured, they are then promoted to district officers. Each district officer move to PA after serving for a certain time, ranging from one to two years thereafter they can be promoted to Chief P.A. Chief PA manages a zone in that Area. A zone is comprised of ten PAs and each PA controls about ten DOs and each DO has about ten wards. ... we have region, each region is composed of ten Areas ... as at now, regions are the highest level. (Onuegbu, 2008)

A district is comprised of 10 wards and the ward which is the lowest level in the hierarchical structure of MASSOB is headed by ward officers (Anayo, 2007; Onuegbu, 2008). For instance, Zone A, which is located outside of 'Biafra', has about 25 functional ministries. Onuegbu puts it thus:

At all the levels, like each region just like any government at the central level; we have directors, the same with other levels of the organizational structure at the local level. Just like Nigeria, where there are ministries at central and commissioners at state level, we have it like that in MASSOB. If you like I bring you the list of my ministries ... transport, market, sports, finance, culture, music and entertainment. If you like, the list is here. I held meeting with them yesterday when I returned from national meeting. I tell

them what to do. ... we have information ministry, mobilization ministry, finance, record and statistics ministry. We have education ministry, we have student affairs ministry, and we have works and industry ministry, women affairs ministry, culture, music and entertainment ministry. We also have welfare ministry, security ministry, market traders ministry, okada riders ministry, motor drivers ministry, chieftaincy affairs ministry, industry and agriculture, health and sanitation, war veterans ministry (those who fought in the war, though they are old men), motor park ministry. They were twenty as at yesterday, but I have expanded them by separating some to give us twenty-five ministries. I gave them authority to run on their own. (Onuegbu 2008)

This horizontal structure is replicated at every level of the organization depending on the peculiarities of the area concerned; the number of ministries may vary (Onuegbu, 2008). This administrative system invests responsibility on almost every member of the group, which in turn generates commitment on their part to the cause and activities of the group. According to Onuegbu, members who serve diligently on a particular position are elevated to the next position after spending two years in that position, citing himself as an example of someone rising from the ranks from ward officer to regional administrator, he explains that upward mobility within the organization is flexible: "I started from ward before mobilizing people and given offices. The whole of the regions here and overseas started from here" (Onuegbu, 2008).

The ministries are functional within the framework of the organization. The ministries are headed by directors at the various layers of authority who are complimented by other members of the organization to ensure that they perform in the areas of competence. For instance, the Ministry of Education organizes adult education programmes for the members who do not have the privilege of formal education, in each of the MASSOB areas. These programmes are held in the evening between 4–6 pm or 5–9 pm depending on the peculiarities of the area in question (Onuegbu, 2008). The Works Department of MASSOB was responsible for the construction of the gigantic Freedom House, headquarters of the organization sited at the Uwazurike country home in Okwe as well as the renovation of the Ijeshatedo Lagos headquarters of the organization in terms of the labour input. Onuegbu explains further:

... if we have our own personal works we do them. If you go to Okwe, you will see what we did there; the Freedom House ... When people see that, they say 'chee' plenty millions have been embezzled. But it is our labour. Any thing we are doing, we do it well, if not material, everything there were done by MASSOB members. ... even here we are, I know Uwazurike built when he was a lawyer but we have done a lot of renovation. I did it when he was in prison. I pull down to roof to put it to this standard and before December, I am finishing everything including doors and window. Even wiring will be done by next month. (Onuegbu, 2008)

The Security Ministry is in charge of intelligence services as well as provision of security for the organization during meetings and other activities. The welfare department is also given some areas of competence to include tendering of the members' welfare needs including family members of those arrested, detained or killed in the course of the struggle. They are also in charge of looking after detained members of the organization in prisons and hiring of lawyers to defend those charged to court for criminal cases (Onuegbu, 2008). Also, the Sports Ministry

organizes sporting activities for members of the organization from the different areas and regions within the administrative system of the organization. The Information Ministry is in charge of publications and propaganda leaflets, which the organization has used effectively in its mobilization efforts. They are also in charge of liaison with the media and disseminate the official view of the organization (Onuegbu, 2008).

Besides the structure and mode of operation of MASSOB, which has helped significantly to draw support for the renewed call for Biafra, the strategy of education and persuasion have also been used successfully by MASSOB to spread their message and arouse the consciousness of Igbo people. The technique of education and persuasion thrives with the peddling of rumours and sentiments through soft publications, which reels out all manners of sensational reports about the group and their activities. Blogospheres and websites that highlight activities of different groups demanding for Biafra are widespread over the internet. There is also a short-wave radio, Voice of Biafra International (VOBI), which broadcasts from Washington, DC and London every Saturday and Wednesday. All these together form the media chain that stirs up and sustains peoples' interest in the renewed demand for Biafra.

According to Eze Okonkwo of the Okwe community, in whose domain the MASSOB's Freedom House headquarters is located, the existence of multiple publications that not only highlight the plight of the Igbo people but MASSOB activities has helped to keep the agenda for actualization of Biafra in the consciousness of the people. A state director of State Security Services in Imo state confirmed the effectiveness of MASSOB's propaganda to draw faithfuls to the organization (Amao, 2007). Uwazurike himself churns out what he calls 'epistles to massobians' on a monthly basis, which he uses to inform the members of his organization on the state of the struggle for Biafra.

Popular support for Biafra and the main group MASSOB spearheading the campaign among the people of south-east Nigeria, especially the Igbo, are not in doubt. For instance, the director of SSS, Mr Kayode Are, a one-time director of SSS, was reported to have said that MASSOB commands a membership of about four million, while his Anambra state subordinate, at the height of SSS clash with the group in Onitsha, explained that the difficulty of flushing out the organization from the town is because in Onitsha one out of every 20 residents, is a member of MASSOB. Uwazurike has often boasted that the group has gone beyond him as a person, claiming membership strength of about 15 million spread across the globe including Nigeria (Uwazurike, 2008). A MASSOB activist, Mr Anayo, confirmed the claim when he stated that the group was able to gather about 30 million signatures supporting the document submitted to the United Nations on the need to recognize Biafra as an independent state (Anayo, 2007). The strongest parameter that indicated the support for the renewed demand was the widespread adherence to the call by MASSOB on 26 August 2004 for people to sit at home as demonstration of their support for Biafra.

### *State response to renewed demand for Biafra*

The initial attitude of state officials to a renewed call for Biafra was dismissive, premised the thinking that the MASSOB which was spearheading the call would fizzle out with passage of time. But subsequent developments forced the government

to reappraise its stand especially after the 22 May 2000 re-declaration of Biafra at Aba. The authorities had before this event dismissed the demand for Biafra and labelled MASSOB activists who were engaging in rallies in popular markets in Lagos as attention-seeking bands of never do wells, but the huge crowd that turned up for the re-declaration rattled security agents who did not anticipate such a crowd, leading to the lost of two lives.

The two who died at that event were the first casualties in the renewed demand for Biafra to die in the hands of security agents. That incident marked a remarkable change in the approach of the state to the renewed call for Biafra: becoming repressive. As a result, several casualties have been recorded following clashes between security operatives and activists demanding for Biafra. For instance, several human right groups have documented catalogues of MASSOB casualties in the hands of security operatives. One of such, People Against Right Abuse in Nigeria, in their 2006 report recorded that about 80 MASSOB activists have lost their lives, 66 arrested, detained and arraigned, 106 detained and tortured, while 217 were arrested and humiliated (PARAN, 2006). The worst of this repression occurred in Onitsha, after the Anambra government ordered a shoot-on-sight of MASSOB members. The organization claims that about 700 of its members lost their lives as a result (Onuegbu, 2008).

Those incidences had followed the attempt of MASSOB to dislodge a parasitic body called the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) from the motor parks and markets in that city. This self-imposed responsibility led to crisis, which prompted the state government to ban the two groups from operating in the state, and instructing security operatives to ensure that such order is enforced in the state even if it takes the shoot-on-sight of violators. But this heavy-handed nature of the government notwithstanding, most members of the MASSOB were not deterred by such antics. One of them, Mr Anayo, had the following to say:

If we follow the reason of killing or that we may be killed and shirk from this struggle for independence, then it implies we have resigned to enslavement forever. But God forbid, we cannot remain enslaved forever even if we remain one, the promise of God made to the Israelites shall be fulfilled. So whether we remain one or three, we shall still be looking for Biafra until God grants it to us. (Anayo, 2007)

The kind of sentiment expressed above runs deep in MASSOB activists and surely the heavy-handed tactics of the government have not succeeded to dampen their confidence in the project. For instance, Mr Onuegbu, commenting on the actions of security operatives, remarked that their members have avowed to remain undaunted in their resolve and ready to defy the brutality unleashed on them by security operative. In his words:

Yes the force that is driving our active members is determination. They have pledged their lives that unless they get Biafra, they would not quit the struggle. They have pledged their lives for Biafra. It is better to die in the struggle of liberty than to live as a slave. (Onuegbu, 2008)

It seems the resilience shown by the members was premised on the belief that their actions are just for generations of Igbo people who would be grateful. This attitude has been fettered by the approach of the state to ethnic activism in Nigeria

which, rather than reduce, stokes agitation. Ethnic movements that enjoy large followership in their region of occupation do so because the government has failed to give the people in those regions a sense of belonging, as the case of the Igbo indicates (Awodiya, 2006). For instance, in the wake of the heightened publicity about the re-declaration of Biafra, the government announced a pardon for former Nigerian servicemen in the armed forces and police that defected to Biafra during the war and conversion of their dismissals to retirement, with a promise to pay all their entitlements. That pronouncement was only implemented in the year 2006 (Edike, 2006). Given that these men have suffered deprivation for many years and the government's lackadaisical attitude to their plight, organizations such as MASSOB capitalize on this lacuna to generate support.

The heavy-handed approach of government to MASSOB in particular, apart from generating sympathetic support to them, is also radicalizing the group. This manifestation started to be visible following the incarceration of Ralph Uwazurike in 2006 and gave room for splinter groups such as Biafra Must Be Society (BIAMUBS) and Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups (COBLIG). The violent orientation of these groups is manifested in the mayhem in Onitsha, Nnewi and other parts of Anambra state between June–July 2006. According to Mr Anayo, the tendency to embrace violence as the solution to realizing Biafra has been a raging question in MASSOB even before Uwazurike was incarcerated. He speaks thus:

Before Uwazurike was arrested; we held a meeting with BIAMUBS directors and other people. In that meeting, they brought out Uwazurike and asked him why he did not want this struggle to take violence. That if it takes violence now, they are sure of defeating Nigeria. Uwazurike told them that the agreement he reached with United Nation was that it is going to be non-violence. Since he doesn't want violence, no matter what you do to him, he will remain resolute carrying on with non – violence, until Nigerians pushes him to the wall he is still saying non – violence. As it is now, they have pushed him to the wall, if he orders us to go on rampage we are ready for that and everywhere will be set on fire. The way it will be our people in Lagos will run when they see us in action right there. That is why he told them that he does not agree with violent struggle. That is why those people broke away from MASSOB to form Biafran Must Be Society. It is not only them; there are other people and groups also. But this Biafran issue the main people looking for it is MASSOB. It is the Biafran war veterans that formed this BIAMUBS. (Anayo, 2007)

If repressive tactics of the government contributed to the crack and division within MASSOB and the into radicalism violence, it therefore has shown that such approach requires fundamental review on the part of the government. This notwithstanding, MASSOB has shown a cohesion that is unprecedented which requires further inquiry beyond the scope of this studies.

## Conclusion

One thing that cannot be taken away is the fact that renewed demand for Biafra is a development that emerged from the dynamics of the Nigerian political processes. It was the contradictions of the Nigerian political system where politics has been defined in the line of ethnic connotation, thus constituting the breeding ground for rhetoric of ethno-nationalism to thrive. Issues engendering group agitations relate to the national question that was not addressed by the ruling elites in Nigeria. It was

what directly led to the emergence of MASSOB, because if the project of the 3Rs declared by the military government of General Yakubu Gowon in 1970 were sincerely carried out in a way that fully re-integrates the Igbo back into the Nigerian society as equal stakeholders, the situation today would have been different.

These lingering issues surrounding the non-implementation of the 3Rs made it easier for elites, excluded or marginalized from the equation of power, to see no other choice but to re-engage into mobilizing along ethnic lines as a means of re-integrating back into the arena of power. And when this power is controlled by sectional ruling elites that have at their disposal the machinery of the state and their vast resources with which they suppress their competitors from other sections, as is the case with Nigeria, they make the formation of MASSOB and other organizations agitating for Biafran independence the only viable option for these marginalized elites.

The decline in economic opportunities and mass unemployment that resulted from the economic policies of adjustment over the years prior to the transition to democracy in 1999, created a large army of the unemployed. The deep frustrations that threw up this army of people who are ready to vent their anger on the system using any means including violence was significant for the success of MASSOB in recruitment. But this alone does not provide sufficient condition for enlistment, as the overriding factor that motivated a large number of individuals was related to issues of perceived marginalization and injustice to the people of the former eastern region of Nigeria, particularly the Igbo.

It is therefore the grievances that contributed significantly to the support of the renewed call for Biafra, received from the people, the majority of whom share in the feelings of marginalization and injustice.

The reluctance of democratic government to address comprehensively those issues that informed the renewed demand for Biafra had further alienated the people, giving the groups championing this renewed demand leeway to consolidate and expand their support base.

Therefore there should be a rethink on the path of the government. A fact of life that is very strong in Africa is that ethnicity cannot be easily wished away. Although it might not be a social force that can act in isolation, it has been entrenched deeply into the fabric of the Nigerian political system to the extent that any search for solution must find accommodation for ethnicity.

For this accommodation to be found there must be a constitutional review, that should radically address the structural imbalance that creates room for some ethnic groups to become powerful and able to marginalize others. Reformation of the state in a manner that devolves power to the communities is imperative. This will make governance more accountable and encourage greater participation by individuals and civil society groups that de-emphasizes ethnicity or can mobilize it for positive development that can in turn eliminate social deprivation, which creates condition for ethno-nationalism in plural societies.

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