

# **Challenging the State in Africa**

*MASSOB and the Crisis of Self-Determination in Nigeria*

## **Dissertation**

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## Zusammenfassung der Dissertation

Diese Arbeit untersucht die „Igbo-Frage“ und aufkommende Fragen der „Igbo-Selbstbestimmung“ im heutigen Nigeria. Sie tut dies im Kontext von umstrittener Bürgerschaft, ethnischen Identitätspolitik und der ungelösten Krise von Staatseigentum und –legitimation, welche alle in die „nationale Frage“ des öffentlichen Raumes in Nigeria münden. Diese Arbeit setzt bei einem theoretischen Standpunkt an, der die „Igbo-Frage“ innerhalb eines „tri-polaren“ Machtkampfes und der Konkurrenz unter den drei ethnischen Hauptgruppen in Nigeria verortet.

Beruhend auf der vorausgehenden Idee der Staatlichkeit, welche in den gescheiterten secessionistischen Bestrebungen der ethnischen Gruppe der Igbo vom nigerianischen Staat zwischen 1967 und 1970 gründet, und zurückgreifend auf den Fall einer Igbo ethno-nationalistischen separatistischen Bewegung in Nigeria, bekannt als „Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB, dt. Bewegung zur Aktualisierung des souveränen Staates von Biafra), liegt der Fokus dieser Arbeit auf dem Gebrauch von „Territorium“ und „Raum“ als Komponenten im Repertoire der Auseinandersetzung in der Suche nach politischem Wandel, Souveränität und Selbstbestimmung. Dies bietet den Kontext, in welchem „Forderungen“ und „Gegenforderungen“ nach Sicherheit, Territorialität und Souveränität gestellt werden.

Während sich die Arbeit erheblich auf verschiedene Formen von Gruppen- und sub-nationalen Rechten bezieht, welche in der Literatur des internationalen Rechts, politischer Philosophie und der Sozialwissenschaften identifiziert und allgemein

untersucht wurden, führt sie über diese Debatten hinaus und legt ihren Fokus mehr auf die aktuellen Prozesse der Aneignung, Interpretation und Anwendung dieser Rechte und Gesetze gegen den Staat in spezifischen Kontexten.

Die Analyse der "Igbo-Frage" greift auf Fragen und Perspektiven um die Salienz, Konstruktion, Mobilisierung und Politisierung ethnischer Identität, und auf die Dynamiken ihrer Anwendung und Nutzung in nationaler Politik, verbunden mit den ihnen innewohnenden diversen Kämpfen, Disputen und Konflikten. Die Forschung bietet innovative und auf Empirie gegründete Einsichten in die Prozesse der Verrechtlichung von Selbstbestimmungsrechten für Gruppen innerhalb des Nationalstaates in Afrika, auf die der Mobilisierung dieser Rechte und Gesetze inhärenten Dynamiken, Beschränkungen und Möglichkeiten, auf die emanzipatorischen Potentiale oder transformativen Ziele dieser Rechte und Gesetze, sowie auf die Rolle der Gewalt in Prozessen des "nation-building" in Afrika.

### **Organisation der Untersuchung**

Diese Forschung gründet auf dem Bedarf nach Sinngebung für die derzeitigen Manifestationen des Igbo-Nationalismus in Nigeria. Das Ziel ist es, das zu untersuchen, was in dieser Arbeit mit der "Igbo-Frage" bezeichnet wird, da sie zentral für die post-koloniale Geschichtsschreibung des Igbo-Nationalismus in Nigeria ist.

Die Dissertation untersucht dies Thema vor dem Hintergrund aufkommender durch MASSOB verkörperter Formen des Igbo-Nationalismus, und innerhalb des Kontextes der

noch zu lösenden “nationalen Frage“ in Nigerias Nationalstaat-Projekt. Sie wendet eine analytische Perspektive an, die die Manifestationen des Igbo-Nationalismus untersucht und die Wandlungs- und Erneuerungsprozesse, welche dieser durch Jahrzehnte hindurch durchlaufen hat, basierend auf den vorherrschenden sozio-politischen und ökonomischen Kontexten, sowie das Aufkommen neuer Akteure und Kräfte im nigerianischen öffentlichen Raum.

### **Arrangement und Synopse der Kapitel**

Die Arbeit unternimmt diese Aufgabe in sechs Kapiteln. Es wird den Übergang von methodischen und konzeptuellen zu mehr substantiellen und empirischen Fragen. Das erste Kapitel ist die Einführung, welche die Hauptfragen, Argumente und Positionen der Arbeit absteckt. Sie führt die in der Arbeit relevanten methodischen Fragen ein, einschließlich des Kontextes und Problems der Studie sowie der Methoden der Datensammlung, -präsentation und -analyse.

Das zweite Kapitel stellt eine detaillierte Besprechung des Konzeptes der “Selbstbestimmung“ und seiner Bedeutung für die Forschung dar. Dies beinhaltet eine Untersuchung seiner konzeptuellen Grundlagen, Herausforderungen, Grenzen, und eine nähere Ausführung der einzelnen und entstehenden Verständnisse des Konzeptes. Seine Bedeutung liegt in der multi-disziplinären Perspektive des Konzeptes, welches aufzeigt, wie Kontexte, Gebrauch, wesentliche fachliche und ideologische Gerüste die Bedeutung, das Studium und die Praxis von Selbstbestimmung prägen. Neben der Untersuchung der Anwendbarkeit des Konzeptes für den afrikanischen Kontinent ist die konzeptuelle

Besprechung ebenso kritisch gegenüber dem Verständnis und der Anwendbarkeit des Konzeptes auf die nigerianische Erfahrung mit der Absicht, den Kontext, in welchem MASSOB im Jahre 1999 mit dem Ziel der Anregung zur Selbstbestimmung der Igbo und zur Separation von der nigerianischen Föderation und dem Übergang in ein alternatives politisches und alternatives Arrangement aufkam, besser zu erfassen.

Das dritte Kapitel, 'Igbo Identity in Perspective', untersucht die Bildung von Igbo-Identität in ihrer vorkolonialen, kolonialen und post-kolonialen Kontexten. Der vorkoloniale Kontext untersucht Igbo-Traditionen des Ursprungs, Kultur und die Authentizität des in der Literatur vorherrschenden Argumentes, dass die Igbo weder eine klar definierte historische noch kulturelle Gruppe in dieser Periode gewesen seien. Die koloniale Periode untersucht das Aufkommen der Igbo-Identität in ihrem weiteren Kampf gegen die koloniale Eroberung und das Streben nach Aufnahme innerhalb des entstehenden Projektes des Nationalstaates in Nigeria. Die post-koloniale Periode erfasst die Höhe des "politischen Igbo-Nationalismus" welcher während der kolonialen Periode aufkam. Diese Forschung zeigt auf, wie diese Tendenzen in den post-kolonialen Phasen des „nation-building“ ausgespielt wurden sowie die Spannungen und Krisen im Management des nigerianischen föderalen Experimentes, das durch ethno-regionale Marginalisierung charakterisiert war, das Aufkommen eines neuen Igbo-nationalistischen Projektes welches in der Schaffung der sezessionistischen Republik Biafra kulminierte und im Versinken im Bürgerkrieg. Diese Periode ist ausschlaggebend für die Studie aufgrund der Tatsache dass das, was derzeit als Igbo-Identität existiert, in



dieser Phase seine Form und seinen Charakter erhielt. Als solche stellt sie den nötigen Hintergrund für die Diskussion der an die fortbestehende Relevanz der „Igbo-Frage“ angrenzenden Aspekte und die Suche nach ihrer Lösung dar.

Das vierte Kapitel untersucht die aufkommenden Formen des Igbo-Nationalismus, wie er durch MASSOB repräsentiert wird. Es tut dies vor dem Hintergrund dreier Phasen in der Geschichtsschreibung des Igbo-Nationalismus einschließlich der Nachbürgerkriegsphase, die Staatsbildungsphase und den Beginn des „Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP)“ (dt. Struktur-Anpassungsprogramm) in Nigeria. Dies Kapitel wird als das wichtigste empirische Kapitel der Arbeit dienen. Hier werden der Ursprung, Ziele und Strategien von MASSOB und sein Kampf mit dem nigerianischen Staat untersucht werden. Dies Kapitel wird auf den während der Feldforschung gesammelten Daten basieren und sie reflektieren: Interviews, Fokusgruppendifkussionen, Zeitungsberichte, MASSOB-Publikationen und andere web-basierte Materialien.

Die Diskussion von MASSOB wird in Kapitel Fünf fortgesetzt, mit einem Blick auf die Untersuchung der Verbindungen der Bewegung mit der Igbo-Diaspora. Als eine Bewegung mit extensiven Verbindungen zur globalen ‘Igbo-Diaspora’, die Igbo-Gruppen und Assoziationen einschließt, weist sie eine Intensivierung der politischen Auseinandersetzung durch Aktivismus, Finanzierung und Unterstützung in und aus der Diaspora auf. Darüberhinaus wird MASSOB als ein alternatives politisches Projekt wahrgenommen und dadurch in eine transnationale radikale nationalistische Bewegung transformiert.

Diese Entwicklung fordert den endogenen Charakter heraus, der der ethnischen Identitätspolitik in Nigeria zugeschrieben wird. Das letzte Kapitel untersucht die Rolle des Igbo-Nationalismus in der Diaspora in der Suche nach Selbstbestimmung. Die Politik der Diaspora enthüllt die Art und Weise, in der afrikanische Gemeinschaften in der Diaspora sich mit politischen Kämpfen verbinden und dadurch indigene ethnische Bewegungen wie MASSOB durch politischen Aktivismus in der Diaspora transformieren. Deshalb bildet das Kapitel die Igbo-Diaspora auf der Grundlage geteilter Interessen und kollektiver Identität, im Hinblick auf eine Untersuchung sozialer, kultureller und ökonomischer Einflüsse, und darauf, wie diese von ihrer Basis eingesetzt werden, um die Anliegen und Interessen ihrer Igbo-Heimat voranzutreiben, ab.

Der Schluss fasst die Hauptergebnisse der Arbeit zusammen und es werden Schlussfolgerungen gezogen. Basierend auf diesen Schlussfolgerungen bietet der Schluss eine Basis für die Untersuchung der Transzendierung und der Auswirkungen des Kampfes von MASSOB und der zukünftigen Entwicklungen für den nigerianischen Staat, auf den er hindeutet.

## **Dedication**

To the Loving Memory of my Father:  
Adolphus Eberediobi Onuoha,

And to my Mother:  
Mrs. Agatha Onuoha  
For her exemplary Love, Sacrifice and Support

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I owe a great debt of gratitude to so many people for the successful completion of this project. First and foremost, my heartfelt appreciation goes to my benefactors, the Graduate School Society and Culture in Motion (SCM), Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, for the opportunity, funding and support provided to do research, embark on fieldwork and attend conferences. I owe very special gratitude to my supervisors, Professor. Dr. Matthias Kaufmann (Director of the Graduate School) and PD. Dr. Jacqueline Knörr, both of whom enthusiastically encouraged and supported me during the difficult period of this research. I thank them both for their valuable criticism, guidance, patience, understanding and suggestions. I thank Dr. Findeis and Mrs. Ulrike Heinze, administrative coordinators at the Graduate School for their support and assistance in the course of this research programme.

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I appreciate the support and encouragement received from friends and the entire members of my family. I especially wish to thank my wife, Stephanie, for her prayers, support, perseverance and exemplary sacrifice in the last three years. Words are not enough to thank her for enduring the long and lonely days while I was away.

Finally, to God I give all the glory.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Overview of the Research

#### 1.0. Introduction

One recurrent feature of politics in recent times is the demand by various ethnic nationalities to be politically recognised and affirmed as distinct identities in a plural society. This politics of recognition, which takes the form of 'nationalism' or 'ethno-nationalism',<sup>1</sup> has gained momentum with the resurgence of nationalist claims on a global scale. As an outcome of shifting political, social and economic contexts globally, nationalist identities are constantly emerging, re-created and re-defined as groups negotiate their identities and interests in the quest for self-determination. While these tendencies pose grave challenges to the security and sovereignty of the nation-states in which they occur, in some quarters they are positively viewed as legitimate movements for minority rights and self-determination. This is against the backdrop of global developments and the crisis of the post-colonial African state which opens up the state to interrogation and continues to shape ethno-nationalist resurgence and the quest for self-determination. The nature of Nigeria's faltering federalism upon which the ruling elite is built and reproduced, the disconnection between the ruling class and the citizens, the absence of a public space for legitimate expression of grievances, and the retreat of the state under the rubric of economic adjustment and crisis in recent times have all combined to intensify the struggles over the 'public sphere' and have elicited

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<sup>1</sup> I shall use these concepts more or less interchangeably, as well as a third concept 'ethnic nationalism'.

the transformation of the 'public sphere' into a contested space and an arena for struggles and claim-making.

## **1.2. Context and Problem of the Study**

### **1.2.1. *Why Nigeria?***

Like most countries in contemporary Africa, Nigeria has been a subject of sustained scholarly enquiry. Prominent among the issues that have engaged scholarly attention in Nigeria are those related its political economy, the crisis of democratisation, state and society relations, nature of inter-ethnic relations, ethno-nationalist claims and other factors behind the country's socio-economic and political crises. These issues constitute the main challenges to development in Nigeria and debates are rife about how best to address them. The number of ethnic groups that make up the country also provide a terrain in which major political issues are vigorously (and sometimes violently) contested along complex ethnic, religious and regional lines (Smyth and Robinson 2001). Some of the issues that attract the fiercest contestation among ethnic groups are those are crucial to the existence and legitimacy of the state, such as, access and claims to state resources and power, citizenship rights and entitlements.

Apart from being the most populous country in Africa (with about 140 million people),<sup>2</sup> Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. It is commonly assumed that Nigeria's more than 250 languages is spoken by the same number of ethnic groups (Bell-Gam and Iyam 1999), but the actual number of Nigeria's ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> This is based on estimates from the last census exercise in 2006.

group still remains contested. Various estimates range from 62 (Murdock 1975), 143 (Olatunde 1978), 161 (Gandonu 1978), 248 (Coleman 1958), 374 (Otite 1990), 394 (Hoffman 1974), 500 (PEFS 2001), 619 (Wente-Lukas 1985). The population of Nigeria's ethnic groups varies considerably with the three largest ethnic groups constituting more than half of the entire population, while the eight largest groups almost make up two-thirds of the population (Nnoli 1995: 27). The population disparities and the attendant differences in the political influence of these ethnic groups divide these groups into two broad camps: the majority and minority ethnic groups. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani (28 per cent of the population), the Yoruba (18 per cent of the population), and the Igbo (16 per cent of the population).<sup>3</sup>

A remarkable feature of Nigeria's ethnic composition is that each ethnic group inhabits an identifiable geographical zone or region. The majority ethnic groups inhabit the North-west zone (Hausa-Fulani), the South-west zone (Yoruba), and the South-east zone (Igbo), while the minority ethnic groups reside in the South-south, North-central and North-east zones. The outcome of the geographical concentration of ethnic groups in Nigeria is that it allows the overlapping of ethnic cleavages and other markers of group identification, such as, region and religion. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani and other ethnic groups residing in Northern Nigeria are mainly Muslims, while the Igbo and other groups in the South are predominantly Christians.<sup>4</sup> With reference to the nature of

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<sup>3</sup> In the absence of any official tabulation of the size and number of each of Nigeria's ethnic groups, these figures are based on rough estimates derived from various reports on Nigeria's population.

<sup>4</sup> The situation in the South-west differs because the Yoruba are both Christian and Muslims, while the minority ethnic groups in the North-central (also known as Middle Belt) are mainly Christians.

these cleavages, its complex political identities and a history of recurring conflicts and instability, Nigeria expresses traits like disintegration, secession, civil strife, civil war, minority agitation and violent conflict, all of which are typical and common occurrences. As such, Nigeria comes across as one of the most deeply divided states on the African continent. This division came to a full glare with attempted secession of the Igbo of the Southeast to create the Republic of Biafra in 1967. The attempt by the Igbo to secede from the Nigerian federation was aborted and the civil war that ensued ended in favour of the Nigerian side, but the continued existence of the Nigerian project did not resolve the 'national question', rather different ethnic identities have continued to challenge the legitimacy of the state and are demanding a radical restructuring of the federal project in a manner that would accommodate their aspirations and interests.

More than any other period in its post-colonial history, Nigeria has witnessed several manifestations of ethno-nationalist projects since its return to civil rule in 1999, after almost two decades of military rule. Despite concrete variations in these ethno-nationalist projects, they are similar to the extent that they incarnate salient strands of 'self-determination', which at best translates into pseudo-separatist inclinations towards de-centralisation, autonomy, and devolution of power as presently constituted in Nigeria. As Ake (1993: 20) notes, 'The vast majority of ethnic and national groups in this country are increasingly feeling that far from being a fair deal, their incorporation into Nigeria is grossly oppressive'. This attests to the increasing alienation of most of Nigeria's ethnic nationalities from the project of national unity. These developments have instigated pressures for the convening of a National Conference of ethnic groups



that will serve as the very basis for the re-negotiation of the nation-state project in Nigeria. It is anticipated that such a 'forum' would provide all the ethnic groups within the federation a platform and opportunity to fundamentally restructure the federation through the devolution of power from the centre downwards, decentralization of power over resources, and the establishment of an equitable basis for belonging to the Nigerian nation-state project.

**Map 1:** Current Map of Nigeria Showing the Thirty-Six States of Nigeria, the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) and the five South-eastern states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo).



Source: <http://www.ncaalumni.org/news>. (Accessed: 8 July 2010).

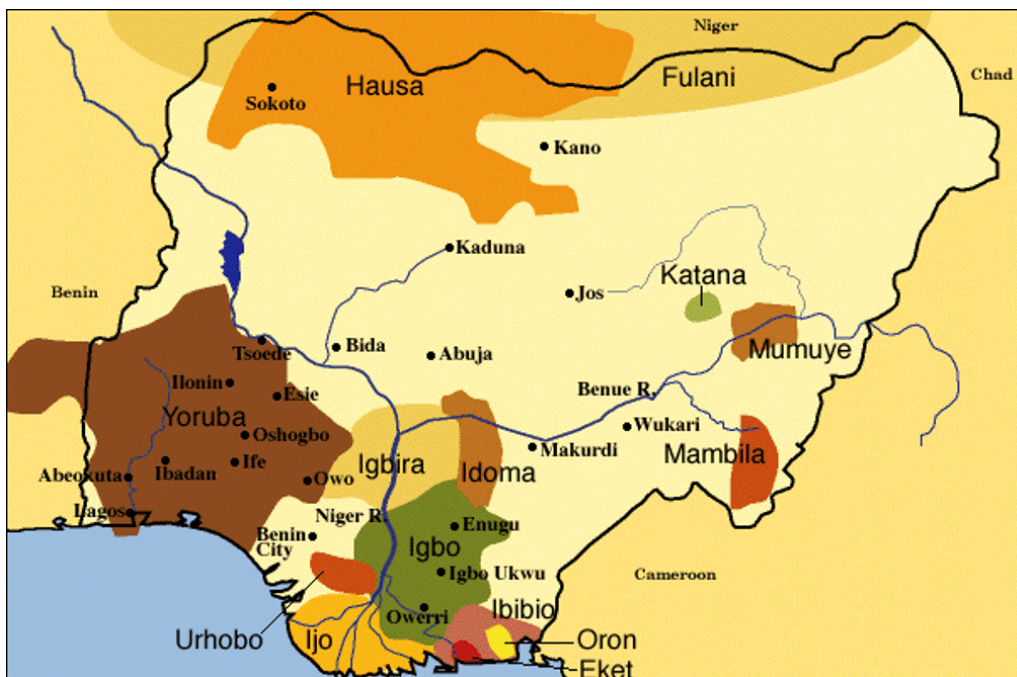
### **1.2.2 *Why the Igbo/MASSOB?***

In view of the foregoing, this dissertation examines the emergent forms of Igbo self-determination in Nigeria. It does this by drawing on the activities of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) as it unfolds within the context of contested citizenship, ethnic identity politics and the quest for self-determination in Nigeria. Unlike other ethno-nationalist movements in Nigeria of Ijaw and Yoruba ethnic extraction, MASSOB's stated objective is to achieve the 'self-determination' of the Igbo culminating in the creation of the state of Biafra by peaceful and non-violent means. Apart from its professed commitment to actualising the Biafran dream by non-violent means, the group's quest for self-determination draws upon a prior idea of statehood which is rooted in the aborted secessionist attempts of the Igbo ethnic group to secede from the Nigerian state from 1967-70. The resurgence of Igbo nationalism as represented by MASSOB marks a radical departure from the literature on self-determination in Nigeria which has largely been associated with minority ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta (Osaghae 1995; Obi 1997; 2001; Ukeje 2001), or the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) of Yoruba extraction prior to its deconstruction by the Obasanjo administration (Adebanwi 2005; Ukeje and Adebanwi 2008).

Owing to the radical tendencies of MASSOB, the movement has been analysed as a manifestation of ethnic radicalisation in Southern Nigeria. For Adekson (2004: 87), who locates the activities of MASSOB within the civil society literature, the movement is categorised 'as an overtly militant and non-mainstream group that exemplifies radical civil society par excellence'. This analysis derives from the group's expression of the

three features radicalism which fits into Adekson's radicalisation model. The first has to do with the group's main objective which is to 'disengage' from the Nigerian project. Unlike other radical ethnic movements in Southern Nigeria who are seeking a reformation of the country's economic, political and social conditions, MASSOB's aim threatens traditionalist who are desirous of a unified Nigeria. Secondly, and resulting from the above, is the movement's use of 'inflammatory rhetoric' in the same manner as other radical groups. Lastly, contrary to its non-violence rhetoric, the movement engages in 'violence' instigated by its members which has resulted in clashes with the state security agents. MASSOB has also come across in scholarly literature as an 'ethnic militia' (Agbu 2004), the emergence of which can be located within the framework of the country's return to democracy. This identifies MASSOB and other ethnic militias as disruptive of Nigeria's nascent democracy after decades of military rule. There is also a methodological angle to the largely sensationalist or delinquent treatment of the activities of the movement by the media (both print and electronic). This is always the case when attention focuses on news-making protests activities, demonstrations, or sit-at-home orders occasionally issued by the movement. Owing to the overwhelming support the movement garners from youths of Igbo extraction, traders and artisans they are branded as naive and misdirected, while the pressing issues which constitute their demands are hardly made the focal point of scholarly enquiry. Questions persists, however, as to what the activities of the movement hold for the prospects of democracy, contemporary social relations and accommodation of group identities in a plural society like Nigeria.

**Map 2:** Map of Nigeria Showing the Igbo areas of Nigeria.



**Source:** Art and Life in Africa Online 'Nigeria Information'.  
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/countries/Nigeria.html> (Accessed: 8 July 2010).

**Map 3:** Map of Nigeria's Eastern Region in the 1950s showing the secessionist region which broke away from the main federation in 1967.



**Source:** Willink et al, 1958. *The Willink Commission Report*.

### **1.3. A Theoretical Premise**

On the basis of observed relationship among Nigeria's three mega ethnic groups and the contending quest for political recognition in a plural society, this research proceeds from a theoretical standpoint that places the 'Igbo Question' within the context of the tri-polar power struggle or competition between the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The 'Igbo Question' focuses on issues such as: the quest for Igbo-Nigerian, Nigerian-Igbo or Igbo citizenship in Nigeria; the place of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria; whether the Igbo ethnic group regarded as part of Nigeria; and how is the Igbo ethnic group defined/perceived in the Nigerian state? The analysis of the 'Igbo Question' draws on issues and perspectives surrounding the salience, construction, mobilisation and politicisation of ethnic identity, and the dynamics of its deployment and use in national politics, coupled with the diverse struggles, contentions and conflicts inherent in it.

This research frames the 'Igbo Question' as a product of the inter-ethnic rivalry between the Hausa-Fulani (North), Yoruba (West) and Igbo (East) which had its roots in the colonial period. This is not to dismiss other categories of contestations or dichotomies in the Nigerian public space, such as: the North versus South dichotomy, the majority and minority ethnic group classification, or the Muslim-North and Christian- South divide, among others. However, the focus on the rivalry between the three mega ethnic-nationalities draws from its colonial antecedents which regionalised the country into three administrative units that coincided with the ethnic base of the three major ethnic groups. This division made these groups the fulcrum of the regions, thereby, laying the

framework and architecture for both colonial and post-colonial politics in Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Historically, this has also made members of these groups the dominant actors in political and economic relations vis-à-vis the minority groups that have continuously engaged in the struggle to redress what they allege to be majority domination of the geo-political regions and the federation as a whole.

This theoretical explication immediately calls into the question issues such as, the nature of ethnicity, its predisposing factors and its consequences in the Nigerian context. Contrary to the cultural perception that sees ethnicity as having a largely cultural basis, its political aspects are very crucial due to the fact that apart from its mobilisation and deployment which are aimed at deciding who gets what, when and how, it also holds enormous consequences for the political process (Osaghae 1995: 19). Hence, this perspective probes into 'how' and 'why' ethnicity comes into play.

Some of the explanations that have been offered for the salience of ethnicity include:

- (i) The existence of state actions and policies which promote or intensify economic, social and political inequalities among ethnic groups, particularly, in a plural society like Nigeria.
- (ii) The established validity of the ethnic weapon in obtaining positive responses to demands on the state whose managers fear that ethnic demands which are unattended to constitute a threat to the stability of the state.

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<sup>5</sup> This was the scenario until independence was achieved in the 1960s and a fourth region (the Mid-West region) was created in 1963 as part of efforts to appease the minorities.

- (iii) The role of ethnicity in the competition for scarce resources and power-sharing between members of different ethnic extractions.
- (iv) The absence or the limited existence of social security nets and welfare policies programmes for citizens.
- (v) The high degree of politicisation regularly attributed to the zero-sum struggle for political competition, particularly, over control of the levers of state power. This in turn breeds anxieties, distrust and acrimony on issues bordering on representation in core government agencies (including the armed forces, public service and other sectors of the economy), and inserts considerations borne of ethnicity into most issues.

While these are necessary predisposing and reinforcing factors that explain the mobilisation and deployment of ethnicity in the process of competition, they do not in themselves provide adequate and sufficient explanations. Using the materialist framework of ethnicity, emphasis should be placed on the 'structure of power relations', which has to do with its connection with the state and the centrality of the state in social reproduction in most African countries (Osaghae 1995: 22; Bayart 1993). Ake (1985: 5) vividly captures this perspective:

*'Power is everything, and those who control the coercive resources use it freely to promote their interests, including the appropriation of surplus. For those who control force, entrepreneurial is unnecessary, for those who do not it is futile. So we have a singularly unproductive capitalism in*

*which force is the means of accumulation and wealth is dissociated from entrepreneurial activity'*

The prospect of state power being made the exclusive preserve of one group or a few ethnic groups, and the potential for its deployment in furthering the interests of members of such groups both account for the anxieties attendant to the structure of state power and who attains it. This scenario posits the state as a party to conflicts between groups, rather than a neutral umpire. The potential for this development has been observed and replicated in most Africa countries. This has been attributed to the post-colonial state lacking autonomising mechanisms which can insulate it from being susceptible to group or class interests (Ake 1985; Joseph 1983; 1987).

As the report by the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development (ACARTSOD 1990: 25) captures it:

*'The African state has not achieved neutrality of autonomy as it concerns the struggle of groups and individuals in the society. Thus, control of it enables individuals and groups to achieve their interests at the expense of other groups and individuals'*

Consequently, control of state power inevitably translates to the most crucial object of political competition because any group excluded from it perceives itself to be excluded from development, and its members from socio-economic privileges and benefits since the state is the largest employer of labour and dispenser of patronage (Osaghae 1995: 23). In the same manner, contending groups scramble with grim determination, polarise their divergences with the conviction that their ability to protect their interests and



receive justice is coterminous with their power, and politics assumes the nature of deep alienation and distrust among political competitors. Hence, genuine fear of being under the power of an opponent becomes real, thereby, breeding a huge craving for power, which is sought without restraint and used without restraint (Ake 1985; Post 1991: 37). These tendencies make the location of a group in the 'power grid' in Nigeria very crucial. The reality of the state in Africa as the major means of social reproduction and the susceptibility of harnessing its apparatuses to serve the interests of one or a few groups to the exclusion of others translates into a struggle and political competition for its control, which is accompanied by the 'politics of anxiety' (Ake 1985). This prevailing scenario lent the 'tri-polar' ethnic power struggle a much broader appeal by giving it the face of a zero-sum contest and brought into sharper focus the potential ethno-nationalist rivalries that engulfed Nigeria at independence. It is precisely against the background of these ensuing ethno-nationalist rivalries among the three dominant ethnic groups and the ultimate impact of these struggles for the enactment of political power that this study examines the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

The central aim of this dissertation is to explore the quest for 'Igbo-Nigerian', 'Nigerian-Igbo' or 'Igbo' citizenship in Nigeria, and what this means in the context of the yet to be resolved 'national question' and the nation-state project in Nigeria. The dissertation therefore, adopts a nuanced exploration of Igbo ethnic nationalism, and examines the historical and social contexts of its emergence in the Nigerian public space. These contexts are also laden with relations and dynamics of power (locally and globally) that

are refracted back into the public sphere making it an arena for resistance, domination, claims and counter-claims.

Simply stated, the main question this research seeks to address is: *What is the 'Igbo question' within the context of Nigeria's nation-state project?*

The following set of questions that flow from this are:

- What accounts for the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria?
- What are the features of the Nigerian nation-state project?
- What is the place of the Igbo in the Nigerian nation-state project?
- What demands constitute the quest for Igbo Self-Determination in Nigeria?
- How can the quest for Igbo Self-Determination in Nigeria be managed/resolved?

### **1.5. Research Methodology**

As already mentioned, this research focuses on the 'Igbo Question', emergent forms of Igbo nationalism and the quest for self-determination as captured in the activities of MASSOB. As a group that hails from my part of the country and whose sole objective is the emancipation of my ethnic group (the Igbo), I have followed, observed and developed a scholarly interest in the activities of the movement since 2005 when I wrote my first research proposal on the issue. I have also undertaken a review of the literature on self-determination and a conceptual clarification of the term, and other terms which are pertinent to this research, such as: state, ethnicity, identity, ethno or ethnic nationalism and nationalism. The research technique adopted is qualitative and the data collection method involves interviews, focus group discussion, ethnography,

archival sources and secondary data (library sources, websites and media reports on the group).

### **1.5.1 Qualitative Method**

Since a research of this nature does not readily lend itself to quantitative methods, this research adopts the qualitative method. This is informed by the argument of King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 6) that 'many subjects of interest to social scientists cannot be meaningfully formulated in ways that permit statistical testing of hypothesis with quantitative data, and they do not wish to encourage the exclusive use of quantitative techniques'. Qualitative research is defined as an approach in which 'research takes as its departure point the insider perspective on social action' (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 270). It is a collection of methods and techniques, and its adoption is grounded in the logic that there is more to social action than can be adequately capture when structured surveys, social experiments or other quantitative techniques are used. With its mode of reporting findings, qualitative research is 'more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value' that a researcher is likely to confront in the field (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 40). While quantitative research typically adopts a technical, numbers-and-tables approach, the qualitative researcher utilises words and 'thick descriptions' (Miles and Huberman 1984: 15).

It is a research approach that favours the 'lived' experience of the subject, and the meanings the subject attaches to the phenomena being investigated. An intrinsic aspect of any research is the possibility of an 'accidental discovery' or 'serendipitous finding'.

That is the discovery (in the field) of aspects of a problem a researcher may not have so far addressed in his or her mind, but which shows up to be of importance in shaping the focus of the research. Various research paradigms have demonstrated difficulty in dealing with such situations, but qualitative research seems more responsive in dealing with such 'chance' findings. As Lincoln and Guba (1985: 40) argue, this is because a qualitative research method begins with the assumption that such findings will almost certainly occur. It is pertinent to state that qualitative research is not necessarily less scientific, nor would it be appropriate to assert that because quantitative paradigm claims to be modelled after the natural sciences it is necessarily more scientific. Since this dissertation thrives on issues related to citizenship, ethno-nationalism and the construction of group identity in the struggle for self-determination against the state, it lends itself to a research design that allows the researcher not only to see things from the outside, but also from the inside.

### **1.5.2 Data Collection**

#### ***(i) Location of Fieldwork***

Nigeria is administratively divided into states and the South-eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria comprises five states which are all Igbo states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states). This is the home base of MASSOB and it is crucial to the extent that most of its activities took place within the region. My observations were mainly in the city of *Owerri*, *Umuahia* and *Onitsha*. While the first two are administrative capitals of their respective states, the third is the commercial nerve-centre of the entire South-eastern region. I also visited Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in the South-south

geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with a tangible Igbo minority population to conduct an interview. The constraints of budget and time could not allow for an extensive work covering the entire region. However, the choice criteria for these study sites was primarily informed by the consideration that they are fairly representative of the region, more so, they are in three different states of the region and also show variations in their responses to the activities of MASSOB. The city of Lagos also served as another veritable centre of research. Apart from being the former administrative capital of Nigeria, it remains the commercial nerve centre of the country and serves as a base for most Igbo people who are engaged in commercial activities in the country. Lagos is also a city where most MASSOB activists who are traders, transporters (*Okada riders*)<sup>6</sup> and artisans reside, and it has the largest MASSOB following outside the Eastern region of Nigeria.

### ***(ii) Ethnography***

The idea of 'ethnography' adopted in this work is relatively loose. It draws from Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1), who see it in the light of the researcher:

*'participating, overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions ..... Collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research'.*

The basic reason for this is that the people that are being studied are made the focus of the research (not the researcher) since they are best equipped to account for their 'lived' experiences. While this method amplifies 'the voices of those on the social

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<sup>6</sup> This is a popular form of transportation in many Nigerian cities where passengers are conveyed by motor bikes.

margins' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 124), the role of ethnography is to 'deconstruct' every story and unravel the hidden assumption behind every participant account. Ethnography allows access to rigorous insider accounts through 'working with people, day-in and day-out, for long periods of time' (Fetterman 1989: 46). However, this is not to give the impression that in a study of this nature, involving the creation, re-creation and construction of ethnic identity in the struggle for self-determination, the totality of the social reality of the subjects are captured. One clear advantage I had in the East is that since I am Igbo I could identify with the social reality of the Igbo and to a remarkable extent I felt like an 'insider'. Hence, I was able to access meanings with relative ease in a short period. An 'outsider' would probably have definitely required, in Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995: 1) word, an 'extended period of time' to access a comparable social depth.

I visited MASSOB Headquarters in Lagos, and attended the meeting of the movement on two occasions. The aim was to monitor and observe the proceedings, deliberations and organisation of the movement. As an external observer I noticed a heightened state of security within and around the premises. This is not unconnected to the incessant clashes between the movement and the State Security Service (SSS) in Nigeria, and the position of the Nigerian government which sees the movement as illegal. My admission into the premises on both occasions was only approved after a proper search had been conducted on me to prove that I was not linked to state security services (SSS).

### ***(iii) Interviews***

In a research of this nature, interviews could aim at deducing what the interviewee knows about the issue in question (Gillham 2000: 13), or it may not focus on ‘the content of the conversation’, but on deconstructing the interviewee’s ‘frame of meaning’ (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 291). Both approaches are important for the reason that the content of the information provided by the respondent and the sentiments it embodies are both crucial. Through the assistance of a Nigerian journalist who had close ties with MASSOB and who had interviewed the leadership of these individuals before, I contacted the individuals I needed to interview to describe the purposes of my study and to schedule in-person interviews. As such, I interviewed the leadership of the movement, and also interviewed members of the movement (both formally and informally). Since I could not record the proceedings on audiotape, I took notes which were later deconstructed to give a general impression of the interview and to interpret the materials I collected.

In the chaotic context of Igbo politics characterised by disagreements on how best to pursue a coherent Igbo agenda, one recurring feature is the grassroots/youth versus the elite/elders divide. In order to articulate the divergent views represented by these two groups, I interviewed some Igbo elites, like the traditional ruler who now presides over an autonomous community in the East. As a former federal government civil servant who studied abroad prior to his ascension to that office, I sought to his views mainly on the marginalisation of the Igbo vis-à-vis the activities of MASSOB. Another interview along this line was with the Vice-President of *Aka Ikenga*, a ‘think-thank’ of young Igbo

professionals that acts as a pressure group and use their contacts to influence decisions and engage the present crop of Igbo political leadership in order to make a positive difference. In these interviews the idea of Igbo marginalisation was real, but they are opposed to MASSOB as to the strategies and modalities to redress the situation.

The method of interview adopted during my fieldwork was in-depth and 'semi-structured'. This is attributed to the fact that with the sensitivity of the issue at stake, the manner of questioning adopted was meant to allow the respondents to give detailed accounts of their views, rather than limit them to a closed, predetermined set of 'answers' or 'assumptions'. The interviews featured mainly open-ended questions primarily aimed at uncovering 'stories', 'insights' and 'deep-seated assumptions' about the issue. The reference to the term 'semi-structured' does not suggest the absence of control or direction in the various interviews conducted. All 'expert interviews' are in a sense structured because they all have the elements of control and are meant to guide a conversation towards a definite outcome (Gillham 2000: 3). Hence, 'semi-structured' interviews are simply more pliable in the manner the researcher pursues the objectives at stake. Yet, there is a need for the researcher to be equipped with a 'structured response' to every reply the interviewee provides in order to give the exercise an overall direction, or what Gillham refers to as 'questioning things into shape'.

#### ***(iv) Focus Group Discussion (FGD)***

There are variations as to the exact definition of a focus group. Research features like organised discussion (Kitzinger 1994), collective activity (Powell et al 1996), social events



(Goss and Leinbach 1996), and interaction (Kitzinger 1995) all identify the contributions that focus group make to social research. Focus group has been defined as 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (Powell et al 1996: 449). Focus group is not synonymous with group interviews. While group interviews involves interviewing a number of people at the same time with the emphasis being on questions and responses, and responses between the researcher and participants, focus groups rely on 'interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of a moderator' (Morgan 1997: 2). The main purpose of focus group research is to draw on respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods. In this context an individual's attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of that of the group or the social setting. Unlike individual interviews, which aim at the individual's feelings, attitudes and perspectives, focus groups evoke a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context.

Although, the parameters for focus group research, such as: the size of the group, homogeneity of the group, sampling of participants, moderator's savvy, and number of groups are clear. The three focus group interviews conducted in this research did not match all the above criteria. Contrary to popular prescriptions advising researchers not to select as focus group participants people who are acquainted with one another, in order to avoid 'consensus' or 'homogenous' responses (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990: 56; Morgan 1997: 37), my focus group discussion in the East was mainly with relatives.

The reason for this is that as members of a small community where everyone knows one another, they also had their own views about MASSOB and its activities which were not necessarily homogenous. Secondly, I did not have to offer them monetary or any other form of 'incentives' for interview which is sometimes the case during a research of this nature. The other FGDs were in Lagos. The first was with a group of Igbo traders and artisans, the second was with a group of MASSOB activists in Lagos, and the third was with three Area Administrators of MASSOB in their Lagos headquarters. For the last two groups, I sought to probe their understanding of the MASSOB struggle within the context of the Nigerian state. I was also interested in their perspectives on whether the resolution of the 'Igbo Question' through a federal restructuring of access to power and resources can lead to a retreat from calling for a sovereign state of Biafra or not. These questions were framed in such a way that respondents could share individual opinions and feelings. To the last group, comprising MASSOB officials, I later posed questions which were more structured and which related to the origin, objectives, strategies and tactics of the movement. This was necessary to 'reinforce' or 'debunk' the various reports about the movement in the media.

#### ***(v) Secondary Sources***

This study significantly relies on rare books collection obtained from the archives. Budgetary constraints could not accommodate a visit to the three archives in Nigeria, hence, I relied on an intermediary who served as my contact with the archives. Among other materials, I was able to obtain photocopies of books on pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of the Igbo, and materials on the Nigerian Civil War. The libraries

and sources I visited outside Nigeria are the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and lately, Rhodes House Oxford (RHO) Library, University of Oxford. I also obtained books, pamphlets, magazines and other materials published by the leader of MASSOB and other members of the movement espousing the ideals and ideas of the movement from their office in Lagos. These materials in most cases were regarded as subversive, illegal and capable of inciting the public, and were not easily available because it is prohibited by the Nigerian government.

The collection of newspapers and magazine articles is important to this research. The reason for this is that most activities of the movement are still unfolding and newspapers remain the only outlet that documents the day-to-day activities of the movement and their struggle with the Nigerian authorities. More so, these sources were important because they served to supplement or reinforce various accounts offered by interviewees, or counter them when they conflict with the newspaper reports in order to show the absence of an agreement or consensus on a particular issue. In recent times, there has been a proliferation of Igbo websites, particularly, from the Igbo Diaspora eulogising the Igbo culture, heroes, folks and traditions. As such, I periodically searched web-based engines, internet-based news sites and other websites that are intent on mobilising support for Igbo self-determination.

### **1.5.3 *Data Analysis and Presentation***

The method of analyzing the data collected in the course of this research involves three simultaneous activities, namely: data reduction, data display and the drawing of

conclusions based on first two. These are all accepted methods in qualitative research and data analysis (Miles 1979; Miles and Huberman 1984). Since this research thrives on data both from primary and secondary sources, the task of data reduction for the primary sources will be achieved through the deconstruction of interview notes and the general impression about the interview for proper insight. For the secondary sources, data reduction will involve summarizing, paraphrasing and subsuming of data under a broader theme or narrative. Secondly, the data display method will involve organizing an assemblage of information in a manner that will involve conclusion drawing. In this study, reference will be made to a historical periodization which will be buttressed by information provided by primary sources wherever possible. This will enhance scholarly tidiness, and the understanding or analysis of a particular event or phenomena in the study.

The conclusion drawing methods will involve deriving meaning from reduced and displayed data. In effect, there will be noting of patterns, themes, configurations and drawing of conceptual and theoretical linkages, as well as building of explanations based on logical chain of events. Narratives as part of social science research will be used in the process of conclusion drawing. Narratives refer to the manner in which we construct disparate facts and blend them together skillfully in order to make sense of our reality (Patterson and Monroe 1998: 315). The process of narrative construction is guided by the theoretical framework adopted in this study and aims to reflect its arguments. Through narratives, this study hopes to integrate 'theory' and 'empirics', and also

embark on a detailed analysis of various events and historical accounts that are salient and worthy of attention.

### **1.6. Organization of the Study**

This research stems from the need to make sense of contemporary manifestations of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. The aim is to explore what is referred to in this thesis as the 'Igbo Question', owing to its centrality to post-colonial historiography of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. This dissertation interrogates the issue against the background of emergent forms of Igbo nationalism as epitomized by MASSOB, and within the context of the yet to be resolved 'national question' in Nigeria's nation-state project. It Adopts an analytical perspective that examines the manifestations of Igbo nationalism and how it has undergone processes of change and renewal over the decades, based on the prevailing socio-political and economic contexts, and the emergence of new actors and forces in the Nigerian public space

#### **1.6.1. *Arrangement and Synopsis of Chapters***

The thesis undertakes this task in six chapters. It will reflect the transition from methodological and conceptual issues to more substantive and empirical ones. The first chapter is the introduction, which sets out the main issues, arguments and positions of the thesis. It engages the methodological issues pertinent to this research, including the context and problem of the study, and the method of data collection, presentation and analysis.

The second chapter presents a detailed review of the concept of 'self-determination' and its relevance to this research. This involves an examination of its conceptual foundations, challenges, limitations, and an elaboration of the disparate and evolving understandings of the concept. The importance of this lies in the multi-disciplinary perspective of the concept, which highlights how contexts, usage, major disciplinary or ideological frameworks shape the meaning, study and practice of self-determination. Apart from examining the applicability of the concept to the African continent, the conceptual review is also critical to the understanding and applicability of the concept to the Nigerian experience, with the intention of better grasping the context in which MASSOB emerged in 1999 to agitate for the self-determination of the Igbo and separation from the Nigerian federation into an alternative political and administrative arrangement.

The third chapter, 'Igbo Identity in Perspective', explores the formation of Igbo identity in its pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial contexts. The pre-colonial context examines Igbo traditions of origin, culture and the authenticity of the argument prevalent in the literature that the Igbo were neither a clearly defined historical or cultural group during this period. The colonial period examines the emergence of Igbo identity in the broader struggle against colonial conquest and the quest for accommodation within the evolving nation-state project in Nigeria. The post-colonial period captures the height of 'political Igbo nationalism' which emerged during the colonial period. This research shows how these tendencies were played out in the post-colonial phases of nation-building, the tensions and crisis in the management of

Nigeria's federal experiment which was characterized by ethno-regional marginalization, the emergence of a new Igbo nationalist project culminating in the creation of the secessionist Republic of Biafra and the descent into civil war. This period is crucial to this study owing to the fact that what presently exists as Igbo identity acquired its shape and character during this period. As such, it presents the necessary background for the discussion of issues bordering on the continued relevance of the 'Igbo Question' and the quest for its resolution in Nigeria.

The fourth chapter explores the emergent forms of Igbo nationalism as represented by MASSOB. It does this against the background of three phases in the historiography of Igbo nationalism, comprising the post-civil war phase, state creation phase and the advent of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in Nigeria. This chapter will serve as the main empirical chapter of this thesis. This is where the origins, objectives and strategies of MASSOB and its struggle with the Nigerian state will be explored. This chapter will rely and reflect most of the data garnered during fieldwork: interviews, focus group discussions, newspaper reports, MASSOB publications and other relevant web-based materials.

The discussion of MASSOB continues in chapter five, with a view to examining the connections of the movement with the Igbo Diaspora. As a movement with extensive ties to the global 'Igbo Diaspora' comprising Igbo groups and associations, there has been the intensification of political contention through Diaspora activism, funding and support. More so, MASSOB is being perceived as an alternative political project,

thereby, transforming it into a transnational radical nationalist movement. This development challenges the endogenous character attributed to ethnic identity politics in Nigeria. However, the bulk of the materials and interviews for this chapter are yet to be collected. It hoped that this will be addressed at a conference.

The last chapter examines the role of diaspora Igbo nationalism on the quest for self-determination. The politics of the diaspora unveils the manner with which diasporic African communities link up with political struggles on the continent, thereby, transforming indigenous ethnic movements Like MASSOB through diasporic political activism. Hence, the chapter maps the Igbo diaspora on the basis of shared interests and collective identity, with a view to examining their social, cultural and economic influences, and how these are deployed from their base to promote the concerns and interests of the Igbo homeland.

The conclusion summarises the key findings of the thesis and some deductions are made. Based on these deductions, the conclusion provides a basis for exploring the transcendence and implications of MASSOB's struggle, and what it portends for the future of the Nigerian state.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Self-Determination: A Conceptual Review

#### 2.0. Introduction

One of the major dilemmas of the post-Cold War era is determining the next phase in the development of human society, political order, and extant local and global political structures. The contemporary political order which emerged after 1989 has been characterized by the 'politics of difference', 'politics of identity', 'politics of recognition' or 'multiculturalism' (Moore 2006: 94), and these developments have spawned the resurgence of various separatist movements, socio-political disintegration and international terrorism. Irrespective of whether we refer to these developments as 'scrambles for recognition' (Taylor 1992; 1994; Honneth 1996); 'cultural rights and multiculturalism' (Kymlicka 1995), or identity-based movements (Young 1990; Connolly 1991), they all represent salient strands in an emergent political landscape with obvious consequences for the development of human society.

A rich literature exists on the right to secede, and this right which emerged out of a reinterpretation of the principle of self-determination of nations has been advocated by ethnic groups globally. Equally critical were debates about justifications for secession that vests the rights of peoples with common groups characteristics to chose whom to associate with politically, the terms under which an ethnic group can seek for self-determination within an existing state, or justifiably separate from an existing state into an alternative political and administrative arrangement. Against this backdrop, philosophical debates about nationalism and self-determination during this period were

directly related to the disintegration of large federations (Soviet Union and Yugoslavia), the advent of secessionist struggles and explicit nationalist sentiments throughout the former communist bloc, Asia and Africa. The triumph of the West, notwithstanding, the argument for the recognition of ethnic identities was buttressed by the fact these identities refused to wither away under the glare of global capitalism, but rather became an increasingly relevant force (Moore 2006: 95).

These tendencies have seriously challenged established sovereignties, territories and the traditional conceptions of the nation-state, while new political authorities and structures are being created. They are vividly apparent, and particularly pronounced in several states across Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia), Asia (India, Indonesia) and Africa (Sudan and Nigeria), and these states remain vulnerable to violent political conflicts and insurgent wars, emanating from movements of excluded minorities or sections of the population that explicitly articulate a demand for self-determination. The processes of self-determination and state transformation in different parts of the globe have continued and accelerated, as is evident in a variety of new conflicts that have erupted, numbering over fifty in recent times (van Praag and Seroo 1998); such as, in Algeria (1990), Democratic Republic of Congo (1996), Indonesia (1997), Bolivia (1994), and in Nigeria (since 1999). In Nigeria, the make-up and character of the Nigerian state since independence, the marginalization of specific ethnic groups, and the economic and social underdevelopment arising from the direct government apathy as perceived by organizations representing these interests have fuelled the agitations for various rights couched in terms of self-determination.

This chapter aims at a conceptual review of the notion of 'self-determination'. The introduction sets out the main issues associated with the term. This is followed by an examination of the multi-disciplinary perspectives attached to the concept. The third section broadly engages the origin and evolution of the term, its conceptual foundations, challenges, limitations, and an elaboration of the disparate and evolving understandings of the concept. This involves its ambiguity and inconsistency within the realm of international law and global power politics, philosophical arguments for its justifications and the beneficiaries of the rights. The fourth section explores the emerging trends in the use of the concept and its contemporary understandings in global struggles for rights and equality. In view of its centrality and applicability to the Igbo project for self-determination in Nigeria, the fifth section deals with the applicability of the concept to the scope of the present study. This is with the intention of fully grasping the context in which MASSOB emerged in 1999 to agitate for the self-determination of the Igbo and separation from the Nigerian federation into an alternative political and administrative arrangement. The focus of this research is predominantly on the latter aspect, but in order to provide a basis for the substantive arguments that will be pursued in the subsequent chapters of this thesis the first four sections are explored extensively in this chapter. The next section outlines three different categories of self-determination pertinent to this study and the conclusions summarizes the major issues emanating from the review.

## **2.1. Disciplinary Approaches to the Concept of Self-Determination**

The disciplinary approach to self-determination in this thesis draws on ethics and political philosophy, and is premised on the free will to determine one's own fate or action without compulsion. This connects a broad range of issues involving a system of individual rights, the innate right to external freedom, the right own property, to have family and contractual claims. This section attempts to show that the principle of self-determination applies to different settings and contexts, such as: politics, religion, education, psychology, child care/parenting, work organizations, addictions, sports, mental health, culture and international law. Since the process of self-determination presents a wide-range of possibilities to persons, groups or institutions within these contexts, this section engages self-determination not only as a necessary and desirable principle in advancing particular interests in each context, but also its pluralistic, contestatory and normative universalism in a global context.

Psychological theory refers to Self-Determination Theory (STD) as a general theory of human motivation concerned with the development and functioning of individuals within social settings. The theory focuses on the extent to which human actions are deliberate or self-determined. This involves the degree to which people guarantee their actions with the highest level of reflection and carry out these actions with a full sense of choice (Deci and Ryan 1985; 2000; 2006). Social work theorists also point to the need to maximize client self-determination (a condition in which personal behaviour emanates from a person's own wishes, choices and decisions) and the principle of client freedom. Thus, making the connection between the ability to reason and strive for

functional autonomy in a social world (Berlin 1975; Richmond 1922).<sup>7</sup> The increased interest by social work thinkers on client self-determination during this period has been attributed to political, ideological and professional factors, but it reflected broader societal goals and reinforced creative and functioning individual values of a free society (Freedberg 1989). In the field of mental health and psychiatric disability, self-determination efforts refers to the right of patients to have full control over their own lives (both at the individual and collective levels) based on the fact that citizens exists within communities in which their decisions affect others and others' decision affect them (Falck 1988; Pierce 2001). This is against the backdrop of the condition of people with mental and psychiatric disabilities who lack self-determination in their own lives, and are therefore, denied the ability to have maximal independence and make meaningful decisions regarding their own lives (del Vecchio, Fricks and Johnson 2000).

Self-determination as a practice is also applied in the understanding of human motivation and behaviour in the domains of sports and exercise. For sports psychologists, self-determination theory in sports is specifically based on the notion that individuals pursue self-determined goals to satisfy their basic psychological needs, maximize performance and adherence, and master tasks. Within this context, it links the understanding of internal motivation in sports and exercise to the maximization of adherence, performance and results (Hagger and Chatzisarantis 2007). With its rise to prominence in 1970s, the children's rights movement perceived children as a

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<sup>7</sup>.Social workers work with people who use social services to assess and respond to their care requirements. This usually involves working alongside other professional agencies to ensure that people who use social services receive the support they need.

disempowered segment of the society and advocated for equal rights for both adults and children, including the right to decide their own living arrangements, associations and medical options (Farson 1974; Worsfold 1974). These demands framed children's rights and entitlements in the form of self-determination which imposed complimentary ethical obligations on the parent and the state. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child upheld these demands in 1989, and subsequently, the survival, protection, development and self-determination of children were identified as children rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989). The emphasis on children's self-determination rights strikes at the core of the legitimate rights and responsibilities of parents to discipline and shape their children's character and behaviour (Baumrind and Thompson 2002). This sharpens the conflict between the rights of children to self-determination and the legitimate responsibilities of parents. Advocates of special education for individuals with disabilities and for natives with special cultural interests have also latched on the concept of self-determination to pursue their arguments. They perceive self-determination as a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enables a person to embark on goal-oriented and self-regulated autonomous behaviour (Field et al 1988; Senese 1991). From the foregoing, the basic arguments stem from an awareness of personal needs which involves asserting an individual's presence, making his or her specific needs known and creating unique approaches to solve them.

Whether in psychology, mental health care, social work organizations, child care/parenting, sports, education, politics and international law, there is a common argument that runs through all these perspectives to self-determination, and this has to

do with a natural tendency towards self-determined behaviour. This tendency is endogenous and is based on the common aspirations of people to enhance their human potentials across a variety of settings. This tendency is couched in the form of civil rights, personal freedom, free will, consent, self-assertion, choice and control over one's life, but requires support from their specific social contexts to function effectively. However, outcomes vary based on particular contexts and the process of self-determination presents a wide-range of possibilities to persons, groups or institutions. These outcomes depend largely on the pattern of relations between an individual, a community or institution and the social context within which they attempt to assert themselves.

## **2.2. Origin and Evolution of the Concept**

The principle of self-determination has long been associated with the long history of democracy dating back to the Greek city-states. Derived from William Warde Fowler's influential coinage, the 'city-state' also meant independent sovereignty, and from it politics and the art of government is derived (Fowler 1893). In this context, the principles of democracy and self-determination both found their historical roots in the emphatic belief that the most fundamental capacity of humans is the power to reason and determine their own course of action. Regarded as a fundamental basis of Enlightenment belief which advocated for people to have the right to 'dispose of themselves', and coupled with its embodiment in the values and principles of the Age of Enlightenment, self-determination brought to light the importance of freedom, the primacy of the individual and the collective will. While grounding the legitimacy of the

state in the respect of the autonomy of its citizens, Rousseau espoused the idea of the 'General Will' as a creation of the people and a means by which people enter into a contract. Kant in his 'Doctrine of Rights' aims at the idea of personal rights which provides the basis for an enduring international peace through the juridical state (*Rechtsstaat*), and also ruled that to guarantee legitimacy 'no independent state, large or small, shall come under the dominion of another state by inheritance, exchange, purchase or dominion (Kant (1795) 2003). Johann Gottlieb Herder (1797, 1997), the German Romantic adopts a 'cultural' approach which emphasizes and advocates a people's expression of their cultural identity and its irreducible uniqueness as an expression of people's individuality. These views are replete in the history of moral and political philosophy in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the 'Kantian conception of morality as autonomy' enhanced various notions of self-governance which existed during these periods (Schneewind 1998).

Self-determination has been applied primarily to nations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been marked by the emergence of new forms of identity politics which have complicated and intensified age-long tensions between the universalistic principles fostered by the American and French Revolutions, and the specificities of contemporary nationalism, ethnicity, religion, gender, race and language, proliferating out of the demise of regional regimes in Soviet-style communism in East Central Europe and Central Asia, and in the African continent (Benhabib 2002: vii). In pursuance of this belief was the emergence of the notion that the 'self' has the right to 'determine its own political system and affiliation', without any restraints (Lata 2004: 15). This legal and political concept



purportedly 'propelled the populace to the highest level of authority as the repository of sovereignty' (Grovoqui 1996: 80). As Umozurike (1972: 3) points out, it was the simplification and translation of this fuzzy phrase 'the right to dispose of themselves' to '*Selbst-bestimmungsrecht*' by mid-19<sup>th</sup> century radical German philosophers that gave birth to the term 'self-determination'.

Given the intellectual environment in which the principle of self-determination emerged and flourished, there was an overwhelming conviction that human groups have the power as well as the right to constitute their own state to serve some clearly defined earthly functions (Lata 2004: 15). The prior belief that the source of all laws was divine, 'according to which all political authority and legitimacy ultimately belongs to God, as expressed by his representatives, the king and the church' (Baycroft 1998: 5) was severely challenged, discarded and seen as illegitimate. Francisco Suarez persuasively argues that the relationship between the subject and the ruler was one of 'active obedience' that is grounded on the pillars of freedom and equality. Therefore, man could 'make' and 'unmake' government and the king's legitimacy is premised on consent since he is above and also part of the legal system (Mackay 1999: 23). While engaging the changing power structures in Europe, the decline of the Holy Roman Empire and the emergence of an international system of sovereignty of states, Hugo Grotius asserted that political power rests on the agreement of the people (Bull, Kingsbury and Roberts 1990). Repudiating all prior beliefs based on divinity, and replacing them with natural law, which affirmed that 'sovereignty is not supra-natural,

but belongs to the people' (Guibernau 1996: 52), became the major intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment period.

During this era, the social contract theorists stood out for pioneering the idea of self-determination in their theories which elaborated on how the people can exercise their sovereign rights. These theories articulated the basis on which 'certain groups form nations which choose their rulers from among themselves' (Baycroft 1998: 5). The social contract theory emerged as one of the most prominent theory on how political authority, whether in the form of representation, legislation or execution of laws can be applied to society. Its premise is that political structures and the legitimacy of the state derive from (implicit or explicit) agreement by individual human beings to surrender (some or all) of their private rights in order to secure the protection or stability of an effective social organization or government. The legitimacy of all laws concerning the individual was premised on the individuals' participation in the enactment of such laws. The intellectual influence which these beliefs fostered propelled the notion of 'self-determination' into the core desire of the American Revolution and ignited the dramatic events that led to the French Revolution.

### ***2.2.1. Self-Determination in the Twentieth Century***

In the course of its complex development through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term self-determination has gone through three phases which are well identified in the literature (Lata 2004: 31; Venugopal 2006: 99). Prior to this time, Gellner (1983: 40-42) draws a fascinating link between the era of the Reformation and nationalism. He argues that

these factors propelled individualism and the proliferation of an urban mobile population which produced a nationalist age. He also links this to - colonialism, imperialism, de-colonization and the rise of nationalism in areas under European influence as expressions of self-determination. In the first phase which emerged in the aftermath of World War I, the principle of self-determination became more explicitly defined and assumed unprecedented international prominence. Thus, 'national' self-determination became associated with non self-governing peoples under different empires and multi-national state. Several factors combined to accord it greater universal relevance and immediacy, such as: the collapse of the Hapsburg, Hohenzollern, Romanov and Ottoman empires; the enduring implications of the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution; and the emergence of the Wilsonian democratic ideology based on self-determination of under-represented minorities of post-World War I Europe. The demise of empire effectively brought an end to the idea of defending a state as the private possession of individuals and the need arose to transfer ownership of the state to the people. Thus, the term, 'national self-determination' emerged and was to serve as a guiding principle for the post-War reconstruction of Europe.

Despite the conflicting interpretations and aspirations of the allies, the advent of the principle of self-determination in international law after the World War I and II drew heavily on Kant's project on 'Perpetual Peace' which rightly anticipated the century's most ambitious practical projects in the global peace (Wood 2000: 62). Partly due to the efforts of US President Woodrow Wilson and Soviet Premier V. I. Lenin, who joined forces and enthusiastically advocated for self-determination as way forward for the

forgotten peoples of Europe the principle gained some practical relevance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Woodrow Wilson, the effective implementation of the principle of self-determination for oppressed peoples was an essential pre-requisite for a lasting peace and reconstruction of post-war Europe. The connection between Wilson's Fourteen-Point Agenda and the principle of self-determination had an enormous influence on the development of international law (Pomerance 1970; 1982; Damrosch 1994; Sunic 1994). However, the need of adopting the principle to create a clear correspondence between people, nation, state, sovereignty and territory proved to be inconvenient during this period as was apparent in the different forms of distortion that manifested in those areas where the principle was applied.

In the first instance, the desires and aspirations of the peoples concerned were not consulted when the principle was invoked to recognize new states (Cobban 1969: 60). As an alternative, plebiscites and the notion of popular sovereignty were not recognized as decisions were made based on opinions of 'one or another group of (mostly self-styled nationalists) national leaders as representative of the wishes of each nationality' (Cobban 1969: 67). Secondly, the quest for territorial acquisition became more prominent and the views of the affected populations were not acknowledged (Heater 1994: 60). Thirdly, most of the new states harboured significant minorities within their populations. Despite these limitations, arguments persisted that the post- World War I peace settlements 'produced a political map more in line with ethnographic principles than ever before' (Heater 1994: 113). But the inconsistencies that attended the

implementation of the principle partly led to the outbreak of a more catastrophic conflict two decades later.

The second phase of the notion of self-determination could be traced to its expression in the 1941 Atlantic Charter when it was affirmed by US President Franklin Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The Charter expressly declared the desires of the signatories to see that all peoples had the right to self-determination and that territorial adjustments must be in accordance with the wishes of the people concerned (Brinkley and Facey-Crowther 1994). In 1944, the principle of self-determination made another entrance into the Dumbarton Oaks proposals which finally evolved into the United Nations Charter. Following the end of World War II, self-determination was included in the United Nations Charter and was subsequently recognized as a right in international law. It features prominently in Article 1 of the United Nations Charter which articulates the purpose of the institution as the development of friendly relations among nations 'based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples'. During the period between 1945 and 1990, self-determination became almost synonymous with the process of de-colonization as the administrative borders of several colonial territories and colonial possessions were remodeled into those of sovereign independent states, eventually throwing up a number of conflicts in its wake.

In practical terms, two major contradictions accompanied the implementation of the principle of self-determination in its application to the de-colonization process. The first

relates to the conflicting interpretations attached to the concept by the victorious powers after the war. Britain, France and other European powers were not prepared to give up their colonial possessions due to the prevalent feeling that these rights did not apply to Africans and other peoples under colonial occupation in Asia, Pacific South America and the Caribbean (Porter and Stockwell 1987: 103). Britain's wartime Prime Minister reiterated this point when he stressed the 'he had not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire' (Ibid, p. 25). In Nigeria, the British Colonial Governor, Bernard Bourdillon was equally blunt and unequivocal about the demands for the restoration of African independence. He argued that the British did not anticipate any change in her policy towards Nigeria, and that the war hampered the opportunity for greater participation by Nigerians in the administration of the country (Njoku 1987: 180). France was also contemptuous of granting independence to its African colonies, as well as those in Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. In the 1944 Brazzaville Conference of exiled French colonial governors from across the world, which was chaired by General Charles de Gaulle, the French position emphatically reiterated that self government for its colonies was not an immediate consideration, not even in the distant future (Deschamps 1970: 249). This obviously informed the desire of France to withhold the right to self-determination to many of its territories in Africa and other parts of the world even when European colonial empires were giving up their colonial possessions for independence.

After World War II, the idea that self-determination should be applied to overseas colonial possessions became widespread by virtue of certain developments which were peculiar to that era. From ending domination generally, the mission was reduced to the abolition of white European colonialism. This tendency was tacitly premised on the notion that self-determination was suitable in redressing domination by non-white or non-European rulers in Africa. More explicitly, given the nature of the revolutionary changes on the continent and the opposition to colonial rule, the interpretation of indigenous African rule as an expression of self-determination was upheld and the existence of intra-African domination was perceived as implausible. The fate of ethnic groups within these newly independent African states was subsequently sealed by this dismissive attitude towards diversity and pluralism. The nation-building project adopted by post-colonial African states drew on the Westphalian model which demanded that the plurality and diversity of African ethnic groups must die in order for these states to emerge (Keller 1995: 622). During the Cold War, ethno nationalist claims thrived in various parts of Africa, but the East-West ideological face-off rendered them inconspicuous, and the quest for self-determination became increasingly steeped in capitalist, socialist or liberal orientations, while little or no attention was paid to the nature of independent states in Africa and the fate of minority ethnic groups within these states.

In the third phase, the enduring instability within de-colonized African states and the ensuing crisis of citizenship within these states intersected with the end of the Cold War. The debate on self-determination received a new meaning following the end of the

Cold War and the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia. These developments were marked by the disintegration of large federations and multi-ethnic states, such as, the USSR, Yugoslavia and the re-unification of Germany, and resurgence of hitherto suppressed currents of nationalism on a global scale. This wave of nationalist resurgence drew heavily on the right to self-determination to justify the assertion of minority rights within large federations. It was under this aegis that 22 successor states emerged out of the ruins of the former USSR and Yugoslavia, and the Czech and Slovak republics voted to go their different ways.

With a reputation of prolonged crises of state legitimacy and governance, the wave of transformations ushered in by the end of the Cold War furnished the global template on which the forces of national and local changes played themselves out in Africa. The de-legitimization of one-party rule and military regimes in the face of a virtual disappearance of super-power rivalries which had previously aligned with these tendencies in the past meant that African states had to open up the political space to accommodate hitherto suppressed ethnic groups and movements. The democratic struggles which had been waged for decades in Africa, but had hitherto been perceived as a fallout of ethnic strife, political chaos and crisis of nation-building began to be seen as emancipatory projects for democracy, human rights and self-determination by the West (Ake 2000: 98). These developments were marked by interstices of democracy which threw up contending forces, both revolutionary and reactionary. In some cases, new parties emerged and won power through multi-party elections, while in others, sit-tight and incumbent regimes won elections by manipulating the state and electoral



machinery, or by dividing or subverting the opposition. Under this banner the principle of self-determination was invoked in support of the struggles of the oppressed African racial majority in apartheid South Africa, ushering in the first multi-party elections in the country in 1994. On a global scale, these developments altered the internal dynamics and stability of a number of fragile states, and remarkably threw up a number of self-determination movements.

### **2.2.2. *Self-Determination in International Law and Politics***

International law and power politics is replete with detailed accounts of the principle of self-determination. However, it is easier to state this than to translate it into practice and render it more relevant to contemporary reality. Determining the 'people' or the 'self' that deserves self-determination appears to be very contentious. This difficulty dates back to the earliest use of the term up to the present era. Its heavily politicized usage and recognition as category in international law makes it value-laden, distorts its descriptive significance and complicates its analytical relevance (Venugopal 2006: 99). As evidenced in some of the leading works in this area, these have been abstracted and interpreted in many cases with remarkable ambiguity or inconsistency (Bowett 1966; Emerson 1971; Blum 1975; Dinstein 1976; Suzuki 1976; White 1981; Kiss 1986; Umozuruike 1972). Though, the principle gained global prominence after World War I, some authors still argue that at the time it was not an established principle in international law (Kirgis 1994; Thornberry 1989). While political philosophers tend to derive the content of this right from past and present political arrangements, international legal theorists have hinged their arguments on the provisions of the

international legal instruments like the League of Nations Charter and the UN Charter which emerged after the First and Second World Wars respectively, and other international treaties which advocate human rights.

In recent times, both international lawyers and political theorists have advanced a new reading of the meaning and interpretation of self-determination which are obviously shaped by current developments in the sphere of state practice. Political philosophers have vigorously addressed the issue as it relates to political obligations and citizenship rights (Beran 1984; 1987; Buchanan 1991; Gauthier 1994; Wellman 1995; Philpott 1995; Moore 1997), while international lawyers have revisited it based on actual state practice and developments globally. Most international law theorists suggest that the broader view of self-determination and its controversial application in international law provide a more accurate explanation of the shift in international state practice. This new approach to the study poses a challenge to long-held opinions, and increases the emphasis on improving standards of human rights protection and the principles of democratic governance in international law (Cass 1992; Brilmayer 1991; Eisner 1992; Koskenniemi 1994; Cassese 1995).

Owing to a combination of historical events, the concept of self-determination has been basically applied to 'nations', 'indigenous peoples' and 'minorities' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While these categories are still vague and contested, there are attempts to explore their usage, context and application in 'politics of identity or difference' (Moore 2006), 'politics of recognition' (Taylor 1994), and in 'multicultural citizenship' (Kymlicka 1995).

The inherent limitations in the concept are also implicit in the legal provisions which serve as a basis for self-determination in international law. The present status of self-determination as a core and fundamental principle of international law has been enhanced by its formal entry into the United Nations Charter. Other international legal documents which advocates for the right to self-determination, includes: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Peoples (1960); the Declaration Concerning the Implementation of the Right to Self-Determination (1960); the United Nations treaties based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1966); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights-ICCPR (1966); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights-ICESCR (1966); the Declaration of Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations among States (1970); the African Charter of Human and People's Rights (1981). While some of these declarations unequivocally called for an end to colonialism, others stressed the granting of political, economic and social rights to peoples and obliged states to promote the realization of these rights as an expression of self-determination. A wholesome understanding of the quest for self-determination and its provision in international legal instruments must be located within the context of the epoch in which it thrived. The circumstances surrounding the declaration of these provisions to a large extent gave rise to the nature of rights, privileges and claims attached to these provisions, and ultimately, define and explain the contrasts and similarities in these legal provisions.

### **2.2.3. *The Right to Self-Determination***

In empirical terms, the concerns that have emerged in relation to the question of the 'right to secede' raises the issue of the extent to which policies and practices in the existing nation states marginalize or undermine members of particular ethnic groups. Within this context, the emerging literature on group rights and self-determination raised the question of the normative status of national identity in general and ethnic identity in particular. Arguments in defense of group right to self-determination and political separation emerged, and specified the conditions under which such a right may be justifiably exercised. The claim that ethnic groups have a right to self-determination or right to secession is often evoked in the discourse of rights, equality and fairness. This point is pushed further when the extant state is perceived to identify with a dominant ethnic group as is the case in most African states and Nigeria, and the only reasonable redress for an ethnic group that claims to be disadvantaged (like the Igbo in Nigeria) is to have a separate state.

Liberal arguments link national identity with both personal autonomy and cultural communities. A central feature of this close relation of liberalism with the idea of personal autonomy is that culture provides the template from which individual's choices about how to live one's life can be made (Moore 2006: 97). Kymlicka (1995: 8) pushes this argument further by asserting that 'individual choice is dependent on the presence of societal culture, defined by language and history'. Miller (1995: 85-86) follows the same line by stating that 'a common culture ... gives its bearers ... a background against which meaningful choices can be made'. Culture provides the repertoires of options

from which the individual chooses, and since a rich and flourishing culture is an essential pre-requisite for the exercise of autonomy, liberals generally argue for measures that would protect culture (Moore 2006: 97). Liberal nationalists reiterate the empirical point that 'most people have a very strong bond to their own culture', and support protections for culture within the state context, or if necessary, secession from the state to ensure that the group has the territorial authority to protect its own culture (Kymlicka 1995: 8).

While focusing on the conditions under which it would be reasonable for a group to secede from a state, Buchanan (1991), Buchanan and Golove (1991), and Orentlicher (2001) all advance a more cautious version of the right to secede by viewing secession principally as a 'remedial right only'. Elsewhere, Buchanan (1997: 34 –37) adds that 'a group should be said to possess such a right only if it is clearly demonstrable that the group has been the victim of injustice at the hands of the state'. Buchanan's version of the theory of secession confers the right to secede only to those groups that can, first and foremost, justifiably complain of a pattern of serious human rights abuses and violations at the hands of the state; and secondly, that are able to establish that they were unjustly incorporated into the state (Buchanan 1997: 37). Republican theories only support political separation on the grounds that it would produce two states in which republican democracy would be feasible in place of one that lacks the necessary preconditions for its successful practice (Orentlicher 2001: 17-18). Recent proponents of a democratic right to secession point to the need to recognize the standard liberal rights of all concerned (Gauthier 1994; Philpott 1995; 1998; Wellman 1995; Beran 1998; Copp

1997). Philpott (1998) bases the democratic right to succeed in the considerations of individual autonomy that is grounded in democracy more generally, and Copp (1997: 291-292) pursues a similar argument by appealing to considerations of equal respect.

The striking features of these arguments, according to Moore (2006: 101), hinges on two theories: the *liberal justice theory* and the *liberal democratic theories of legitimacy*. The first deals with the question of whether the state is a just one, and if the state has in the past engaged flagrant violations of human rights, systemic oppression, ethnic cleansing or genocide of a particular population or group. The second argument focuses on the democratic legitimacy of the state, and the fact that any evidence of widespread rebellion or lack of consent by a group or minority population robs the state of its legitimacy to govern the people. Patten (2002: 561) charts a middle course between the 'remedial' approach to secession formulated by Buchanan on the one hand, and the 'democratic' approach championed by Philpott, Copp and others on the other hand. With respect to Buchanan's proposal that the seceding group must be able to demonstrate that it has been the victim of human rights abuses or that it was involuntarily incorporated into the existing state, Patten argues that a right to secede can be made against minimally just states. Against the democratic approach, Patten posits that under certain conditions, a democratic mandate may not generate a right to secede from a flawless state. For such a right to be produced, Patten opines that there must be either an infringement of Buchanan's condition of minimal justice or a distinct failure by the state 'failure of recognition'. For him, in a situation where a state avoids both of

these kinds of failure, it needs not to worry about secession since a democratic mandate does not on its own merit guarantee a right to secede.

While political philosophers advance different arguments that legitimate secession, a remarkable gap in all of these approaches, according to Moore (2006: 102), is that they do not engage directly with nationalist aspirations, identities and feelings which invariably creates a disconnect between the political philosophy of secession and the actual dynamics of secessionist movements. First, by virtue of the composition of most multi-ethnic states in Africa and given that state elites will not be predisposed to any arrangement that will lead to the dismemberment of the state these normative theories are most likely to be unworkable. Second, there are various forms of ethnic politics which engender secessionist claims and the right to secede. Empirical reasons indicate that once ethnic groups have mobilized for secession based on certain belief about itself as a coherent and separate political entity within a whole, it tends to ignore any form of assimilation or overtures for nation-building purposes. Third, despite the differences in scope and reasoning among these justifications to secede advanced by political philosophers, there seems to be an enthusiasm about most of them that secession can produce homogenous successor states and that in those cases where heterogeneity remains minority rights will be guaranteed.

#### ***2.2.4 Title-Holders of the Right to Self-Determination***

The theoretical problem that emerges from these provisions, obligations, declarations and rights has to do with deciding who the 'self' refers to. The 'self' has been variously

attributed to nations, indigenous peoples and minorities. The definition of the 'self' continues to be fraught with difficulties. . As Emerson (1964: 27-29) puts it, 'the inescapable heart of the matter is the necessity of establishing what 'self' it is to which the right attaches. They can have no answer of a more universal character than those which are fitted to a given time, place and circumstance'. Based on these difficulties, there is a need to determine which entity or unit (nations, indigenous peoples or minorities) can justifiably claim grounds for self-determination. Since these groups constitute an important criteria in the understanding of the right to self-determination, it is necessary clarify them by embarking on a conceptual debate of each category in relation to the concept of self-determination.

***(i) Nations***

A nation has been defined as 'a society united under one government' which is synonymous with a state or country. This sense of the term reflects the common speech usage and also appears in phrases like 'Laws of Nations' or 'League of Nations' (Carr 1939: xvii). The association of nation and state is commonplace and widespread in literature. Gellner (1983: 3) notes that the definition of nationalism feeds on these two, and as he further argues, 'nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances' (Gellner 1983: 6). Weil (1952: 95) asserts that 'there is no other way of defining the word nation than as a territorial aggregate whose various parts recognize the authority of the same state'. This view is complemented by Deutsch (1969: 19), who defines a nation as 'a people who have hold of a state', and Hertz (1944: 7) who claims that 'every state forms



a nation and every citizen is a member of a nation'. These definitions tend to lead to the conclusion that the state and the nation are identical concepts or two parts of the same concept: while the state relates to the institutional sphere; the nation relates to the individuals who participate in the formation and activities of these institutions. However, as Tamir (1991) contends, when the term nation appears in the definition of the state, it is often used in combination with nation-state, signifying one of the various possible forms of a state.

The principle of self-determination was primarily applied to nations following developments after World War I. In the aftermath of the war, and after the effective demise of the Hapsburg, Hohenzollern, Romanov and Ottoman empires, the principle national self-determination emerged on the global agenda as a way of granting popular sovereignty to different 'nationalities' that made up these empires. Galtung's (cited in van Walt and Seroo 1998: 11) definition of the nation as 'a group of people that hold certain points in space and time as sacred' is reflective of the situation after World War I. In his definition, space is the motherland and time refers to points in history. It does not apply other criteria such as the commonality of language, ethnic identity or a shared religion to identify a nation, but gives more significance to territorial attachment. Conversely, Keating (cited in van Walt and Seroo 1998: 11) differs by identifying a nation as a group that makes a claim to self-determination, not necessarily an ethnic and homogenous group. This incorporates various definitions but argues against any one clear definition due to the contention that in different contexts the concept of nation

has different meanings, and a regular definition may be deficient to nuances and incongruent with indigenous perception of nationhood.

Stemming from the above, there is a bifurcation of the understanding of the term 'nation', both in essentialist and conventionalist terms. The essentialist perspective captures nations as products of an ethnic group, race or a putative folk culture which draws from the healthy, pristine and vigorous life of the peasants (Gellner 1983: 57). This differs from the constructivist perspective which sees the nation as a product of the imposition of a high culture on society in order to create a semblance of forced unity out of diversity, cohesion out of mutual exclusiveness, and homogeneity out of difference (Benhabib 2002: 8). The international community theoretically created states in Eastern and Central Europe along national demarcations from the ruins of defunct empires a pragmatic step which in reality did not provide a generally applicable conclusion and an objective definition of the concept of nations. Rather it prolonged the debate about the identity and origin of nations. In recent times and with the benefit of hindsight, it is safe to conclude that the principle which led to the formation of nations in the early twentieth century is flawed and vulnerable. This point is even more evident in the existence of overlapping ethnicities and multiple identities which co-exist within different nations. At the same time, the concept of the nation is also a reality and is one with a tremendous influence.

**(ii) *Indigenous Peoples***

The concept 'indigenous peoples' has no intrinsic meaning. It is a concept that applies to peoples in a particular context. As such, it is pertinent to identify who the term 'peoples' can apply to in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the whole concept. In general usage, international law and other contexts, the term 'peoples' evoke different meanings. The term also refers to a state: as in the people of a state; a nation: in its collective and political capacity. In international law, the concept is defined differently for the recognition of diverse rights for peoples. For instance, the right not to be exposed to racial extermination and the right not to be deprived of one's existence are 'plainly relevant to a very broad category of groups even more than the principle of self-determination' (Crawford 1988: 169-170). As such, there is no strict definition of 'peoples' in international law. Cristescu (1981: para. 269) notes that 'it will be found that there is no accepted definition of the word 'peoples' and no way of defining it with certainty. There is no text or recognized definition from which to determine what is a 'people' possessing the right in question.' Even as it concedes that all peoples have the right to self-determination, the United Nations carefully avoids the definition of peoples (Stavenhagen 1990). The typical reason advanced is that the concept is too vague, imprecise and difficult to define (Espielle 1980: para. 50). In the context of self-determination, the ordinary meaning of people tends to relate to 'a specific type of human community sharing a common desire to establish an entity in order to ensure a common future' (ibid, para. 56).

Other scholarly definitions of 'peoples' stress two forms of requirements (objective and subjective) which must be met before a group of individuals may be considered to be a people in the context of self-determination. While the objective requirements encompass such factors as common language, culture, religion, race, ethnicity, territory and history; the subjective requirements relates to the collective state of mind, that is the way in which the relevant and other identities have been created, consciousness as a distinct people and a political will to exist as a distinct people. In actuality, since people tend to construct and negotiate their national identity by drawing on certain elements like language, culture, religion and history, the objective and subjective elements can be perceived as related, and can be applied to groups, communities that see themselves as such (Bengoetxea 1991; Dinstein 1976). The use of the concept of 'peoples' emanated when the framers of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights focused their attention on who the right to self-determination applied to. They adopted the term 'people', rather than 'nations', in order to forestall the difficulties associated with the latter. This turned out not to be a great improvement due to the fact that arriving at an acceptable definition for 'people' was not easier or different (Mayall 1999: 481). However, a more detailed definition was proposed in 1989 at the UNESCO International Meeting of Experts, known as the 'Kirby Definition' (named after its principal drafter Justice Michael Kirby). It identifies a people as: 'a group of individual human beings who enjoy all or some of the following common features': common historical tradition; racial or ethnic identity; cultural homogeneity; linguistic unity; religious or ideological affinity; territorial connection; common economic life.

Applying some of the criteria stated above, it is evident that indigenous people are those whose members share a common culture, history, ethnic identity and territory, which is distinct from the dominant society of the state in which they live, and therefore, would be entitled to the right to self-determination (Cristescu 1981: para. 260). The major reason why the right to self-determination fails to include 'indigenous peoples' has to do with the consequences of its application, that is, the violation of state sovereignty. In view of these contestations, the crucial issues lie in the vital importance of defining 'peoples' in order to identify which groups satisfy the common meaning of the word; how the definition of 'peoples' in international law is arrived at by those applying the right to self-determination; and if 'indigenous peoples' qualify as holders of the right to self-determination.

***(iii) Minorities***

From the perspective of its implementation, the right to self-determination has been extended to minorities. This opens up the category for examination and calls into question certain issues related to the concept of 'minorities': who they are and if they qualify for the right to self-determination. The essential elements in any definition of the term include: numerical inferiority, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious characteristics distinct from those of the rest of the population of a state; and the non-dominant position of the minority (van Walt and Seroo 1998: 11). Similar to other groups who accede to the right to self-determination, the issue of identification also plays an important role determining who a minority is or not. Both objective (how a

group is perceived) and subjective (self-identification of a group) criteria apply. These categories are not necessarily contradictory or incompatible, rather a group may evolve from one category to another as circumstances vary. Precise and inflexible definitions may not justify the fluidity in the categorization of communities and groups, and ignores the great diversity of situations in which these groups may find themselves.

In international law, the legal definition of 'minorities' as given by the United Nations is reflected in the study undertaken by the Special Rapporteur in the 'Study on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities' (Caportorti 1977).

The study defines minorities as:

*'A group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state and in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the rest of the population who, if only implicitly, maintain a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion and language'.*

The 'minority' definition offered above contains a lot of information, and further highlights the issues that are crucial to the discourse of minority rights and the need to maintain their identity. The key issues arising from this definition include: numerical inferiority; minorities are essentially groups; minorities exist within a state; minorities occupy a non-dominant position; ethnic, religious and linguistic differences; a majority that maintains a sense of solidarity in relation to the minority; unity aimed at preserving the culture, traditions, religions and language of the majority.

The fact that international law gives all peoples the right to self-determination also extends that right to 'minorities'.<sup>8</sup> This means that if a 'minority' is accepted as a people, it can also make recourse to the right to self-determination. Thornberry (1991: 14) argues that:

*'Self-determination is usually described as the right of peoples not minorities. But self-determination and minority rights are locked in a relationship which is part of the architecture of the nation-state, since the creation of state results in the creation of minorities. Self-determination is now an accepted principle of international law, but a restricted principle for minorities.'*

Elsewhere, Thornberry (1989: 867) also points out that 'self-determination and minority rights are two sides of the same coin'. The Belgian Thesis at the UN General Assembly was one of the earliest attempts to link the issue of minorities to self-determination (Langenhove 1954). The thesis suggested that:

*'A number of states were administering, within their own frontiers, territories which were not governed by the ordinary law; territories with well defined limits, inhabited by homogenous peoples differing from the rest of the population in race, language and culture. These populations were disenfranchised; they took no part in national life; they did not enjoy self-government in any sense of the word.'*

The argument advanced here still remains relevant to minorities who exist within post-colonial states presently. The fact that these groups exist within states that have been granted self-determination has not guaranteed their rights, they still have no recourse

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<sup>8</sup> See Article 1 (1) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966.

to influence their political future as guaranteed by the international Charter-based system. In essence, these positions can only be applied if the qualification of 'minorities' as a people is accepted. But the debate about who qualifies as a 'people' still remains contested, and thus, the issue of 'minorities' and their status in relation to the right to self-determination remains largely unresolved.

Having examined the title-holders to the right to self-determination and the salient issues that surround the application of the right, there still exist ambiguities about the concepts of nation, indigenous peoples and minorities. These ambiguities include what definitions to attach to them; and who they include. The vagueness of these concepts creates a problem which is further compounded by any attempt to fill them with an empirical content. Given the elusive, contradictory and politicized nature of these concepts, they lend themselves to equivocal and diversity of opinions. Hence, there can be no definition, understanding or agreement of a universal nature in relation to these concepts, rather any application would inherently be contextual and appropriate to a given time, place and circumstance.

### **2.3. Emerging Trends and Contemporary Conceptualization**

In recent times, several points of departure appear necessary when re-articulating the concept of self-determination in order to render it more relevant to contemporary reality. The scope of the term has been broadened beyond 'national' self-determination to include all movements that attempt to effect a radical reconfiguration of state power in pursuit of well-defined social, cultural, political or economic objectives. To this end,



the term has been used to frame the diverse array of political crisis and nationalist uprisings which have been profound in producing a steady flow of discreet conflicts in international and domestic politics in a post-September 11 global setting. The phenomenon and force of self-determination weaves through broader global problems like terrorism, failed states, crisis of nation-building, rivalry among great powers, natural resource conflicts, clashes between the modern and traditional populations played out in religious and cultural conflicts, and conflicts between 'winners' and 'losers' arising from an increasingly globalized world system. As Venugopal (2006: 100) notes, central to this extended adaptation of the term is that 'it describes a process of quite fundamental transformation in state-society relations'. This translates into the process of contesting and re-constituting the existing state institutions and structures in order to achieve certain socio-economic and ideo-political transformations in society. Nevertheless, the use of the term 'self-determination' retains a significant analytical and epistemological relevance for two reasons. First, it involves a process of identity formation and the complexities attached to it. Second, it conveys the sense that conflicts emanating from the pursuance of this right should not just be viewed in terms of the chaos and violence they have engendered, but also as a manifestation of large-scale social, economic and political transformations being contested, implicitly and explicitly.

In the first instance, there is a sense in which 'the right to self-determination entails the right to self-definition' (Stavenhagen 1996: 7). Hence, the right to define the 'self' belongs to the concerned collectivity, but the exercise of such a right, like any other

right is amenable to several forms of abuse (Lata 2004: 67). One form of abuse is the 'maximalist' position which results from an over-extension of this right, granting any group the right to designate itself as a people, and subsequently, demand self-determination. The resulting implication of this practice is that it has the potential of demeaning and devaluing the principle, as well as turning it into a recipe for chaos and anarchy (Stavenhagen 1996: 7). The other form of abuse is the 'minimalist' posture which recognises only the collection of individuals residing within an existing state as constituting a legitimate people, amounting to a negation of the right to self-definition. In Stavenhagen's (1996: 7) view, determining what constitutes a reasonable exercise of the right to self-definition 'needs a thorough-going collective effort to spell out the universal, rigorous criteria by which the defining characteristics of the claimants to self-determination will be accepted as widely as possible'.

The second point in the analytical and epistemological relevance of the concept relates to the context in which the self-determination exercise is being carried out. This context is characterised by a world-system moving away from the relatively tidy system of nation-states in which the principle of self-determination was first adopted, towards a more fluid and uncertain period in which national sovereignty is being challenged and eroded by pressures from above and below (Danspeckgruber and Watts 1997: 2). This enforces the search for new ways of self-definition, distinct from the previous fashion that led to the advent of the nation-state (Lata 2004: 70). In this new form of state that is emerging, the architecture and accompanying functions are still evolving as well. Hence, the state demands a new kind of identity politics that recognises the complexity

and plurality of identity as well as the prevailing thresholds of respect for human rights and other democratic principles.

Despite the ambiguities associated with the term, the enduring analytical relevance of the concept still remains in contemporary policy and academic discourse. As Venugopal (2006: 101) argues, understanding self-determination in the global context involves comprehending 'the possibilities inherent in the global system for the rise and sustenance of self-determination movements'. This is evidently reminiscent of the role of global forces in influencing and accentuating group identities, heightening economic tensions, or providing financial, moral or diplomatic support to self-determination movements. Immediately linked to this is the indirect 'global dimension of self-determination' which has to do with the global construction of statehood in economic, political and normative terms (Venugopal 2006: 101). The idea of statehood which provides the terrain on which self-determination projects are manifested is limited, not only by internal factors, but also by global forces. In most post-colonial states, the idea of de-colonization shaped the manner in which they agitated for self-determination, and what passed for self-determination involved little institutional or structural change. As such, self-determination was framed by the prevailing global normative criteria aimed at putting an end to colonialism. In the aftermath of independence, post-colonial African states became increasingly constrained by global political and economic institutions and structures that substantially influenced by discretion what statehood constitutes, without recourse to the internal dynamics of these states.

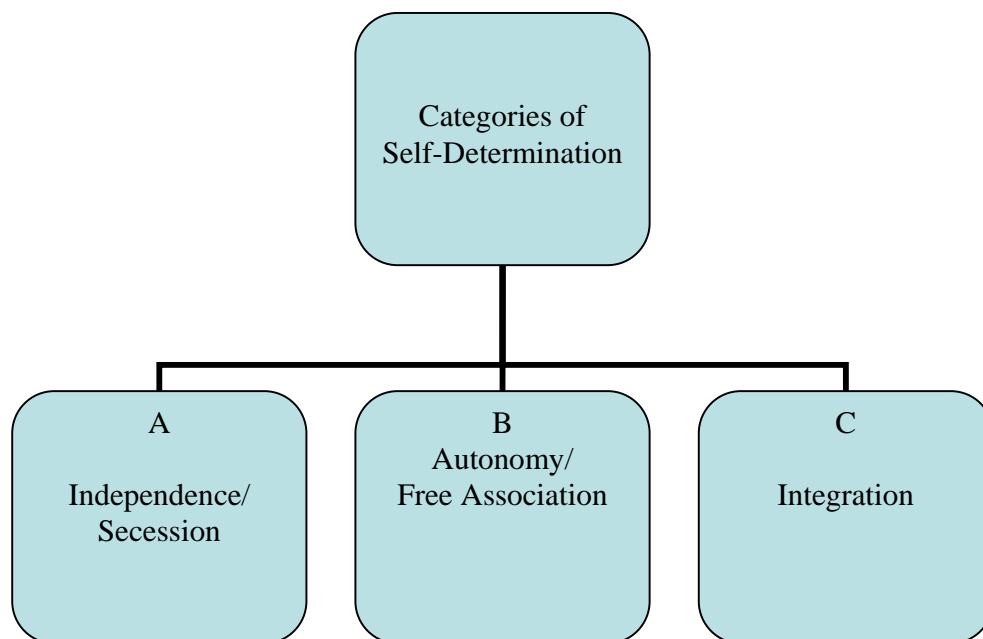
#### **2.4. Self-Determination and the Scope of the Study**

The quest and agitation for self-determination can be viewed as part of the paradigmatic shift in the approach to national cohesion in multiethnic African states generally. In most African countries, and indeed, in Nigeria, the quest for self-determination has taken place within the context of contested state legitimacy and a longing for aggrieved ethnic groups to be allowed to play a part in the determination of their own future. Re-negotiating the make up of the state was to be done through state reconstruction, and on the basis of greater political autonomy, including the need to recognise control over local material resources, inclusiveness, more equitable access to state power, and the re-orientation of the state to accountability and democracy (Osaghae 2001: 2). The failure of the state in Africa, at all levels, to actualise these demands led to the upsurge in anti-state uprisings in the late 1980s and early 1990s across the continent. These groups out rightly rejected state-led processes, if there were any, and mostly adopted a separatist stance in the form of an ethnic project for nationhood couched in terms of self-determination. It is within this context that this study attempts to explore emergent forms of Igbo nationalism as presently expressed in Nigeria.

Among the litany of campaigns that adopt the idea of self-determination are demands for control over territory, freedom to practice a religion, recognition of a language or the physical autonomy of an individual, among others. The right to self-determination embodies different categories of choices which aim at the continuance of a people's participation in decision-making and control over their own destiny. However, this study

adopts a working definition of the concept of self-determination to encompass '*a process consisting of the quest by a group for control over their own destiny*'. This aptly places within the definition of self-determination struggles broader aspirations which aim at: first, outright political independence or secession from an existing state (such as the struggle for Igbo secession in Nigeria and the Tamils in Sri-Lanka); second, more autonomy or political participation within a state (as in the struggle between Burma's ethnic minorities and the country's military regime); third, a major change in the values and organization of society (a case in point is the struggle between an authoritarian state, Islamists and the democratic movement in Algeria). Each type of struggle may assume violent or non-violent forms depending on the actors, context and content of the claims involved. This sets in motion a process in which a people's quest for self-determination and a change of status is advanced through three typologies illustrated below: (i) Outright political independence or secession from an existing state; (ii) More autonomy or political participation within a state; (iii) A major change in the values and organization of society leading to integration.

**Figure 4:** Categories of Self-Determination



**2.4.1. Category A: Independence or Secession from an Existing State**

The quest for independence, separation or secession from an existing state represents the most prominent view of self-determination, and is regarded as a right of last resort adopted after all other measures have failed. The right of self-determination is granted to occupied or colonized territories that seek outright political independence which is guaranteed by international law (International Court of Justice 1975: 32). Separation or secession occurs within a state where successive governments have repeatedly oppressed a particular group for a long time; where the human rights and fundamental freedom of its members have been violated; where its representatives are excluded from decision-making in matters bearing on the well being and security of the people, suppression of their culture, religion, language and other attributes of identity which is

of value to the group; and where other means of achieving a sufficient degree of self-government have been tested and have failed. This scenario gives rise to the question of separation or secession as a means of restoring the fundamental rights, freedom and furtherance of the well-being of the people in question (van Walt and Seroo 1998: 16).

This scenario can gain relevance in a situation where the international legal provisions and political system do not provide sufficient forms of protection and assurance to groups or peoples that are marginalized within the borders of an independent state. Concepts of minority rights, indigenous people's rights and human rights have on different occasions failed to protect communities against collective abuse, exploitation and suppression. As such, a group may attempt to secede in view of the fact that an independent statehood provides the only means of obtaining the level of freedom, rights and self-actualization they aspire to. Scholars of different persuasion, ranging from international law, international relations and political philosophy advocate secession based on different reasons.

Reisman (1983: 151) argues from a legal perspective that 'international law expresses guarded preferences for the avoidance of territorial division, but accepts them when order and justice are more likely to be served'. Reisman's view of order and justice includes a focus on human rights, and implies that secession can only be accepted when these rights cannot be achieved by other means. Reisman adds that 'boundaries should be designed to be instrumental to the achievement of major social goals. In particular, they should facilitate rather than impede social contract between group members' (Ibid,

168-169). While similar, Suzuki's (1976) view places less emphasis on the negative aspects of secession by explicitly opining to world public order (including the recognition of human dignity for all) while maintaining minimum public order (minimizing the negative effects of striving to achieve the goal). He argues that the principle of territorial integrity and 'domestic jurisdiction' are not 'absolute or sacred', instead, both principles must be subservient to the overriding concern for human dignity' (Ibid, 848). Ultimately, the overriding concern in the choice between the territorial integrity of a state and its disintegration is that of human rights: any choice 'should be made in such a way as to establish a fundamental basis for the enjoyment of all human rights' (Ibid, 862).

Buchheit's (1978) approach is identical to the views stated above in that the legitimacy of a claim to secede results from a balancing of all the various factors concerned. This position not only accommodates claims for secession that improves the plight of a group in the face of oppression and human rights abuse, it also advocates for 'parochial secession,' where claims for self-determination are simply based on the preservation of group identity and control of the group's own political destiny, and not necessarily based on the denial of human rights (Ibid, 224-235). Chen (1976) shares this generous view of the legitimacy of secession. He argues that self-determination would remain a reverberating philosophy, a symbol for group formation and identification, and a symbolic representation for the perpetual search of the collective self. In essence, groups should be permitted to separate from established nation-states when it tends to promote wide sharing of values for the group directly concerned without causing any unjustified hardship to the remaining community of which it was a part of, or any



disruptive consequence on the public order, both in regional and global terms (Buccheit 1978: 241). However, Chen's (1976) view emphasizes the sharing of values, group formation and identification which appears to be broader than what references to the protection of human rights provides.

Conversely, Brilmayer (1991: 177) emphasizes a different view, arguing that human rights abuses are not in themselves enough to validate a right to secession, but rather a claim to secession must encompass a justification to possess the territory that is in question. Essentially, in order for a secession claim to be seen as legitimate, it must frame a theory of sovereignty over territory within the state. If this is established, other standards, such as, human rights abuses and the extent of disruption of the present state as a result of granting secession will then be measured (Ibid, 199-201). The most radical element of Brilmayer's (1991: 178-202) thesis is the opinion that the satisfaction of human rights through secession as opposed to the territorial integrity of the state is improper. Beitz (1979: 104) offers a view of international relations which holds that 'self-determination is a means to the end of social justice'. This view conceives social justice as embracing what is typically encompassed by references to human rights, with each instance depending 'on the contents of the principles of social justice appropriate to particular groups' (Ibid). Thus, the right to secession can only be broadened to include all groups 'when it can be shown that independent statehood is a necessary political means for the satisfaction of appropriate principles of justice' (Ibid, 112).

Buchanan (1991) makes one of the most recent contributions to the legitimacy of secession from the perspective of political philosophy by arguing that the most convincing ground for establishing the legitimacy of secession is when a group has been treated unjustly, and when such injustices encompasses more than typical consideration of human rights. Buchanan (1991: 152-153) states that while injustice is the principal and least controversial of the valid moral justifications for secession, self-defense, cultural preservation and the goals of political affiliation may also legitimate secession. The right to secession as proposed by different theorists relies entirely on some specific factors that are peculiar to the situation in question. However, the major impediment to the recognition of the right of self-determination is the present principle of state sovereignty. Adherents of the state maintain that granting the right to self-determination to groups based on the principles of justice would not engender world peace. World peace will only be achieved if the principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention are adhered to (Brilmayer 1991). This implies that if groups within a state are granted a qualified right of secession in order to achieve the right to self-determination, then the current absolute devotion to the principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention will have to be compromised (Iorns 1992: 46).

#### **2.4.2 *Category B: Autonomy or Free Association***

The right of a people to possess their own autonomy or mode of association within an existing state is always at the core of the concept of self-determination. This broadly involves the need for governing institutions to exist in a manner that allows 'groups' or 'indigenous peoples' to live freely and determine their own destiny. Autonomy refers to

the quest by a people to preserve their identity and culture by assuming possession, control and management of their land and other natural resources on it. This resonates deeply in a situation where people have special connection or bond with the land and natural environment, and where people derive spiritual, cultural or economic strength and vitality from the land and its resources. Autonomy is also expressed in the form of giving a group the right to develop, promote and preserve its language, culture and history. In a political setup, it involves granting them the entitlement to a full measure of self-government with their own institutions and representation, and within their own territories in a regional or federal arrangement.

At a more general level, there are arguments that measures adopted to achieve the participation of indigenous peoples or groups must respect and support the internal organizational structures of such populations. Consequently, governments must desist from policies aimed at intervening in the organization and development of indigenous peoples, and must grant them 'autonomy', together with the capacity for managing the relevant economic processes in a way they deem fit to their interests and needs (Cobo 1986: para. 268). The term 'autonomy' in this sense refers to 'possessing a separate and distinct administrative structure and judicial system, determined by, and intrinsic to that people or group' (Ibid, para. 273). The main requirement of any arrangement is that it must guarantee that all human rights of indigenous peoples are protected. Hence, the focus will not solely rely on political rights, but will include all categories of rights identified by 'indigenous peoples' or 'groups' as essential to their survival. While most of these rights exist in international law, the practice and implementation of such rights

proceeds differently. For instance, the rights to personal security are recognized in the right to life, liberty and security of the person in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Cultural rights of peoples are recognized in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and religious rights are recognized in Article 18 of ICCPR.

However, at the cornerstone of these rights is the adoption of the political rights in a manner that recognizes and guarantees representative local and national governments. If autonomy is recognized through relative independence or free association, the other rights become easily realizable and protected from abuse. For Hannum (1990: 468), indigenous societies may have their own governmental structures within states. He acknowledges that 'the preservation of such traditional structures may be the best means of guaranteeing effective autonomy. So long as members of indigenous communities desire to maintain their form of government, those structures should normally be immune from the intervention of an outside authority'. This does not imply that the autonomous regions are immune from 'the overall framework of the fundamental norms of the state,' since 'autonomy is not equivalent to independence' (Ibid). But Hannum (1990: 468) stresses that 'the state must adopt a flexible attitude which will enable the autonomous region to exercise real power, precisely when that exercise of power runs counter to the state's inherent preference for centralization and uniformity'. This does not address a situation where indigenous peoples are not presently territorially defined, but dispersed throughout a state, whether through

voluntary dispersal, oppressive policies of government, historical accident or a combination of all. Iorns (1992: 40) argues that an option would be to create territorial areas of autonomy. Another option would be to adopt additional group rights within the government at the centre based on an agreed political arrangement or mechanism, thereby, creating greater power-sharing among groups. The system and specific governmental and institutional structures will be determined entirely by the situation of the indigenous peoples and the state in question. In Hannum's (1990: 333) words, this will include the preservation of traditional indigenous cultures and an appropriate balance of power between the local and central governments. An inherent challenge peculiar with this approach is that there are no set standards for assessing when it is achieved. The absence of an objective and acceptable criteria leads to states perceiving these measures as promoting separatism, while the indigenous peoples see themselves as being denied their right to internal self-determination or free association. As Iorns (1992: 40) suggests, whatever method or mechanism is adopted, they need not depend necessarily on the traditional conception of Western-style, individualistic, majority rule democracy. Any arrangement must take context, time and place into cognizance.

#### **2.4.3 *Category C: Integration within an Independent State***

The right of a people to be fully integrated within an independent state through participatory democracy also forms an aspect of the right to self-determination. This involves a major change in the values and organization of society in order to recognize the right of a people within a state to participate in decision-making at the national level; ensure the equality of all 'peoples' or 'groups' within the state; and adopting a

revenue allocation formula in which national revenues are shared based on where they are derived from. Sometimes, the recognition and integration of the values and distinctiveness of a people within a state can form the main thrust of a self-determination bid. The process of integration is based on the assumption of the need for uniformity within a state in a manner that merges diverse elements of different cultures while they still retain their separate identity. As Castellino (1999: 407) argues, the policy of integration does not eliminate all cultural differences within a state; rather it eliminates those that are perceived to be harmful to the general unity of the state. For Thornberry (1991: 4), he sees integration as a constructive concept, in as much as, it eliminates pure ethnic cleavages and guarantees equal rights and opportunities.

These requirements are most times emphasized in democratic societies where the structures and institutions that exist do not reflect broader societal needs. For instance, the marginalization of a particular group from centres of economic and political power raises question about the structure and organization of the state. Although, democracy and aspects self-determination are closely linked, this confirms the fact that democracy does not readily satisfy the requirements of self-determination. There are democratic states with a centralized mode of access, extraction and distribution of natural resources, and a power relation skewed in favour of one 'group' or dominant groups to the detriment of smaller units and constituencies.

The three broad categories of self-determination discussed above highlights the quest for self-assertion and the right for people to determine their own destiny. Of particular

importance, is that this right allows a people to make a broad range of decisions ranging from: choosing its own political status, determining its own form of economic, cultural and social development exempt from external interference. The exercise of these rights can lead to different outcomes of self-determination: political independence or secession; autonomy or free association; or full integration within a state. While **Category A** has qualities and objective standards against which it can be measured; **Category B** and **C** possess qualities which are identifiable, but difficult to measure. This relates to the nature of 'autonomy' or 'integration' in question. In actual practice, contending interpretations are applied to these categories and this lends it to diverse conceptions. However, while they also harbour their strengths and weaknesses, each of the three categories is arrived at based on a different history, political, moral and legal contexts.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has extensively examined the concept of self-determination, as well as its applicability to emergent Igbo quest for separation or exit from the Nigerian state into an alternative political and administrative arrangement. This chapter highlights how contexts, usage, major disciplinary or ideological frameworks shape the meaning, study and practice of self-determination. It is also intended to provide a conceptual basis that fosters a comprehension of the disputed or controversial usage of the concept with a view to understanding contemporary explanations of 'self-determination' that are rooted in specific local settings. After engaging with the conceptual foundations, challenges, limitations, and an elaboration of the disparate and evolving understandings

of the concept, it suffices to state that what emerges at best is an ambiguity and inconsistency made worse by international law and global power politics. The notion of self-determination epitomises how an idea emerged under specific historical and political context, but travels through time and is reproduced in different contexts. Hence, it is pertinent to note that in understanding contemporary explanations of 'self-determination' attention must be focused on the fact that the transformative ends in each context is to structure power relations that recognise the complexity and plurality of identities leading to context-specific changes.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Perspectives on Igbo Identity

#### 3.0 Introduction

The development of Igbo identity has been of crucial importance to modern Nigerian society, particularly (but not solely) because of its connection with the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War (1967-1970), when the Igbo area in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, attempted to secede from the Nigerian federation into a different political and administrative arrangement known as the Republic of Biafra. Popularly referred to as a struggle for Igbo self-determination in Nigeria, the war was one of the most protracted in post-colonial African history and has impacted severely on the modern political history of Nigeria. In examining the 'Igbo Question', it remains pertinent to really consider how the process of becoming 'Igbo' developed within the context of a Nigerian state, how this provided a militant and collective identity to a people hitherto recognised as disunited, and what this portends for the reinvention of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. Presently, the Igbo regard themselves, and are regarded, as a people with their own common culture and shared history for centuries. As some evidence which will be examined in this chapter suggests, the age-long claim of Igbo homogeneity only became pronounced in the 1960s. A united Igbo community did not exist in the area until the emergence of colonial rule in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when an all-encompassing Igbo identity developed on the basis of the existing communities.

The idea that Igbo unity is an academic imposition on diverse Igbo groups still exists, but this view does not deny that the similarities which are now considered to be the fundamentals of a shared Igbo culture never existed at all; rather it argues that in the pre-colonial period the Igbo did not consider these similarities as germane, and that an awareness of shared cultural similarities emerged among the Igbo based on forging together smaller units (Bersselaar 1998: 10). This gave rise to the formulation of an Igbo identity which claimed to incorporate all Igbo-speaking communities (Smock 1971: 205). By the late 1960s, owing to several political developments in post-colonial Nigeria, a sense of Igbo identity had matured so strongly that the Igbo believed in, and mobilised for an independent state within the context of the political developments in Nigeria, and as events were to prove, they were prepared to fight and die to achieve it. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the evolution of Igbo identity in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. As such, the chapter is largely based on existing literature. This attests to the substantial amount of research and the proliferation of literature focusing on this epoch in Nigeria's history. What is important in this context is an exploration of Igbo identity formation across these phases, the factors which influenced it and the how it was deployed in the ethnic rivalry between the dominant ethnic groups in the country. This chapter examines three broad stages. The first stage involves an examination of the people, referred to as the pre-colonial Igbo, who used to inhabit the geographical area now known as Igboland and to identify what we can reconstruct of their society. The second approach aims at engaging the process of becoming Igbo within the context of the colonial state in Nigeria which ties Igbo identity into an

emerging pattern of relationship. This is in view of the fact that the Igbo interacted intellectually and physically with colonialism and its accompanying vestiges, like Christian missions and western education; and also had relations with their neighbours in pre-colonial times, the nature and consequences of which was redefined in the colonial context. Third, this relationship transformed into a power tussle with other ethnic groups with the emergence of party politics, ethno-regional organisations and nationalist politics, and ultimately, engendering the emergence of 'political' Igbo nationalism.

### **3.1. The Igbo in Pre-Colonial Context: People, Territory and Identity**

Igbo traditions of origin differ widely throughout the Igbo area and most times they do not provide a reliable historical source of accessing the Igbo past. Even when evidence of historical reliability is present in these traditions (Miller 1980; Vansina 1985), the main objective is often geared towards explaining the current social and political context which tends to provide legitimacy for certain leadership claims vis-à-vis a neighbouring Igbo community (Lentz 1994: 67-69). For the purpose of clarity and scholarly tidiness, this study adopts Falola's (2005) categorization of Igbo traditions of origin into three phases. The first is the tradition of 'oriental' origins which has two strands: one identifies the Igbo as one of the lost ten 'tribes' of Israel; while the other traces their origin to ancient Egypt. While the claim to Hebrew origin is linked to the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano (1794: 25-28, cited in Falola 2005) an ex-Igbo slave who wrote 1789; the work of G. T. Basden (1925) early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave it some credence by pointing to close resemblances between Igbo culture and Jewish culture,

without affirming that the former necessarily descended from the latter. With some level of academic respectability, other contributions to the study of Igbo origin claim that they migrated from the Nile Valley in Egypt to their present location, linking the Igbo culture to that of ancient Egypt (Jeffreys 1946; 1956: 120-124). Traditions in the second group trace the origin of the Igbo to their neighbours, like the Edo Empire of Benin and the Igala Kingdom of Idah, pointing to the linguistic similarities of the Igbo with these groups (Onwuejeogwu 1977). The third tradition of origin is one that claims autochthony and origin in the present area of Igbo land, though not always in the exact location where the Igbo are now located (Afigbo 1981). While an exhaustive discussion of Igbo traditions of origin is beyond the scope of this thesis, it would be more meaningful to treat the question of Igbo origin and traditions relating to it, not so much as dealing with 'origins', but as dealing with the intricate interrelationships and antecedents that helped to forge the phenomenon known as the Igbo identity.

Furthermore, traditions of origins are sometimes analysed and disseminated in a manner that position some groups as unrelated to their immediate neighbours.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the Igbo, the nature and consequences of the multi-faceted relationships with their neighbours: the Benin (to the west); the Igala (to the north); the Efik (to the east); and Ijaw and Kalabari (to the south) had enormous an impact on internal developments in pre-colonial Igbo land. Among other things, this led to inter-group migrations (Alagoa 1971: 337; Jones 1963: 29-30; Afigbo 1965: 269); trade links (Alagoa 1970; Afigbo 1973:

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<sup>9</sup> Most traditions of origin do this by laying claim to a 'divine' or 'sacred' root. The Igbo tend to advance the 'pure tribe theory' in the rendering of the Igbo as a 'pure race'.

86); conflicts (Isichei 1976: 92; Egharevba 1960: 13); and inter-cultural penetrations and borrowings (Nzimiro 1972: 255; Egharevba 1960: 41-83; Forde and Jones 1950: 52, 59). Since no society exists in isolation, the relevance of demonstrating these relations stems from the fact that the history of any group of people would be incomplete without an in-depth study of the inter-relationship between the group in question and its immediate neighbours. In the Nigerian context, such studies help to feature the underlying unities of the people that eventually make up the Nigerian state, and interrogate the notion of Nigeria being an artificial creation of British colonialism. Apart from enhancing a national consciousness, this throws light on present relations and projects likely future trends.

The area now considered to be 'Igboland' is situated in the southeast of Nigeria. Based on Bersselaar's (1998: 43) study of the Igbo area, the length from the north to the south, and east to the west, spans about 250 kilometres; the territory is divided by the River Niger, Nigeria's major river; and most of Igboland, at least four-fifths of the entire area, is located to the east of the River Niger, while one-fifth is situated to the west. More so, the Igbo area possesses no natural frontier, such as rivers or mountains; its borderlines are made up of peoples. This makes the boundaries of Igboland identifiable only by approximation (Onwuejeogwu 1981: 16). The Igbo area is bounded in the west by the Edo people from the Benin area and other small ethnic groups. In the south, the Igbo are regarded as part of the West Africa coastal forest belt, but it does not extend up to the coast. It borders a motley combination of small ethnic groups which make up what is known as the Niger Delta. The eastern boundary consists of communities on the Cross

River, some of which are closely related to groups in the eastern part of the Igbo area. In the north, they are bounded by the Igala, who are mostly Islamic owing to the impact of cultural influences from the north. The Igbo area incorporates the coastal rainforest belt to the northern savannah and semi-desert environment. A part is well-watered by rivers and the other areas are quite arid. Major differences exist in terms of population density in the Igbo area, while certain parts are densely populated with over 400 inhabitants per square kilometre (Zuidervliet 1982: 27), other parts are sparsely inhabited. A couple of densely populated, busy and sprawling cities which are all important in their own rights are located in the Igbo area, the most important include: Onitsha, Aba, Owerri, and Enugu.

Early sources on Igbo traditional culture did not regard the Igbo as a monolithic group until the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Buchanan and Pugh 1962; Green 1947; Forde and Jones 1950; P. Ottenberg 1965; S. Ottenberg 1959). Prior to this time, the boundaries of the Igbo areas were yet to be clearly defined, and the notion that all the groups in the area spoke the same language and shared certain cultural elements did nothing to persuade the inhabitants of the area to regard themselves as one group. They comprised more than 200 segmented groups which functioned as distinct societies and were organised on the basis of patrilineal clans or lineages consisting of 30 villages or local communities bounded together by a common language, customs and beliefs (Anber 1967: 169). The monolithic kingdoms, hierarchical administrative systems and centralised political structures that existed in the Hausa Emirates of Northern Nigeria and the Yoruba constitutional monarchies of Western Nigeria were not prevalent in

most Igbo societies. The bulk of the literature in history and social anthropology describe pre-colonial Igbo society as 'stateless', 'acephalous', 'segmentary' and 'individualistic, comprising autonomous villages and village groups ruled by dispersed authority void of formalized, permanent or hereditary leadership positions (Meek 1937; Green 1947; Uchendu 1965). As Lord Hailey (1951: 155, cited in Anber 1967) observed, 'the large Igbo community presents perhaps the most outstanding structure in which it is difficult to find any definite seat of executive authority, a characteristic which it has retained up to this day'. It is pertinent to state that since existing Igbo traditions of origin remain contested till date, this study takes a description of pre-colonial Igbo communities existing at the advent of colonialism as a starting point in studying Igbo identity. It is against this background that the pre-colonial basis for Igbo identity and the process of becoming Igbo is articulated and understood.

### **3.2. The Igbo in Colonial Context: Identity and Ethnic Nationalism**

The advent of colonial rule marked a remarkable episode in the development of Igbo identity. First, it provided the context in which what became known as 'Igbo identity' developed and became appropriate to a large segment of Igbo population. Once colonialism took root, the emergent social, economic and political context it ushered in meant that there was a need to move beyond the autonomous villages and villages groups based on dispersed authority. The need to transcend the existing structures in the area based on 'primitive disunion' was one of the aims of British colonialism (Perham 1962: 253). Second, the different attempts at colonial conquest and efforts at colonial administration in the area, gave rise to definitions of what the Igbo culture was

and who the Igbo were, or were not. For the British, the need to establish an understanding of the population and political units led to the use of population censuses in the area.<sup>10</sup> This meant that topographical boundaries were assigned to the Igbo area, and certain cultural traits and forms of political arrangement were now classified as being typically Igbo. As Talbot (1969: vi, cited in Barsselaar 1998) notes, attempts at delineating who the Igbo were became a crucial aspect of the British colonial enterprise.

The fragmented nature of Igbo society into several autonomous village communities posed a problem for the establishment of colonial rule. Like in most parts of Nigeria, British rule in Igboland was imposed by treaties of surrender, trade or protection, which involved negotiation, diplomacy or force, or a combination of all. Eventually, as Afigbo (1980: 410-414) argues, military conquest became the primary means through which British colonial rule was imposed on Igboland. In a string of military expeditions which started in 1849 and lasted up till 1914, the British embarked on the conquest of various villages and communities in Igboland which resisted British occupation openly or passively, but effective conquest and occupation of Igboland did not materialize until 1917. Even then, British troops were still marching throughout the Igbo heartland engaging communities, villages and settlements which considered themselves independent. Until the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 and the formal establishment of British colonial rule, the East was part of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885, and subsequently became part of the Niger Coastal Protectorate in 1893 and the Royal Niger Company. The Igbo were militantly anti-

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<sup>10</sup> NAE; OWDIST 9/6/2, 'Southern Provinces 1921 Census Report', cited in Barsselaar 1998: 77.



colonial and 'Indirect Rule' as a policy of colonial administration which thrived on existing indigenous socio-political formations in other parts of Nigeria effectively broke down in the East because such structures did not exist in Igboland. Within the wider framework of Igbo resistance to colonial rule in Nigeria, the Ekumeku Movement in western Igboland, the Aba Women's Riots of 1929 and the Tax Riots of 1938 marked remarkable episodes. These incidents revealed the scant knowledge British colonial administrators had about the Igbo, and in the 1930s and 1940s local colonial administration in the East came under severe pressure to re-organise and accommodate existing realities in the East through the commissioning of various ethnological studies involving Christian missionaries and colonial administrators in the area (Berselaar 1998: 174).

Although, marked by initial rejection and resistance, the Igbo settled into the system once colonial rule took root. For the Igbo, colonial rule offered its own social and economic opportunities by opening up new sectors of the economy in which they operated. The dynamic response of the Igbo to these new opportunities and change has been explained as a consequence of the traditional Igbo way of life which thrives on competition and social mobility (Ottenberg 1962: 130-143; Njoku 1990: 1). This is also plausibly explained by the fact that missionary education in the east had provided the Igbo with necessary skills and knowledge of the English language which the northerners lacked, thereby accounting for the large number of Igbo working for the colonial administration (Berselaar 1998: 84). Moreover, Achebe (1983: 46-47) captures Igbo culture as 'being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive'. This, he

argues, positioned the Igbo for advantage and gave them unrivalled status in colonial Nigeria. Ezera (1964: 10) identifies the spirit of open rivalry, the spirit of aggressiveness and the egalitarian belief of the Igbo that there are no social or class barriers to self advancement as a main feature of Igbo life.

In contrast to the Hausa-Fulani in the North, who were restricted by a conservative religion; or the Yoruba in the West, who were inclined to favour traditional views; the formal establishment of colonial rule in the East spawned an enterprising tendency among the Igbo as they became more mobile, receptive and nationally oriented than other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. For Anber (1967: 168), the unrivalled pace with which the Igbo advanced faster than all other ethnic groups in Nigeria within a relatively short period can be ascribed to the pace and nature of 'Igbo modernisation' in a plural society. Confronted with internal challenges occasioned by land hunger, impoverished soil, population pressures and the worldwide depression of the 1930s (Isichei 1976: 152), the Igbo in search of economic and educational advancement had to migrate massively to urban areas within their own region, and outside their region to the Northern and the Western parts of Nigeria (Nnoli 1978: 220). As Coleman (1958: 76) observes, by the end of World War II the Igbo had constituted a considerable minority group in every urban area in the country and had amounted to 'more than one-third of the non-indigenous population of the urban centres in the Northern and Western regions', and by 1952, the Igbo constituted forty-five percent of the total non-indigenous metropolitan population of Lagos (Government Statistician 1953/54, cited in Anber 1967: 171). More so, they formed mutual benefit associations, credit societies

and 'improvement' organisations which maintained ties with their rural homelands. These developments led to frictions between the Igbo and the indigenous population of these regions. These tendencies were more pronounced in the North where the enmity between the Igbo immigrants and the Northern indigenes led to the Jos riots 1945 and Kano riots in 1953. The Report on the Kano Disturbances described it as 'so spontaneous, so violent and so widespread that no thinking person could assign to them short-term causes. The influx of Igbo into Hausaland had transformed the landscape of Kano into a community which represents the meeting place of two contending cultures' (Report on Kano Disturbances, cited in Anber, 1967: 171).

Initial Igbo migrants to the urban centres functioned as traders, shop-keepers, clerks, skilled workers and domestic employees. With the passage of time they soon began to acquire white-collar jobs and began to cultivate intellectual elites comprising educators, journalists, professionals and businessmen. Anber (1967: 171) attributes this to the level to which they responded to Western education in their bid to catch-up with the Yoruba who by virtue of their early contact with Western education had an advantage over other ethnic groups in Nigeria. By the late 1940s, the disparity between the Igbo and Yoruba in terms of Western education had virtually diminished. Coleman (1958: 333) illustrates this with the situation at the University College, Ibadan, where they had as many Igbo students (115) as Yoruba students (118) in 1952. By regions of origin the distribution of students expected to graduate from Nigerian universities in 1965/66 academic year was stated as follows: East: 2,031, West: 1,728, Mid-West: 380 and North: 369 (Anber 1967: 173). More so, Igbo headed the Universities of Ibadan and

Lagos as Vice-Chancellors, and with the expected retirement of the foreign Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nigeria, an Igbo was positioned to take-over. In due course, the educational and economic advancement of the Igbo positioned them as administrators, managers, technicians and civil servants in the country, and they began to occupy senior positions disproportionate to their size. This was particularly evident in the Federal Public Service and government statutory corporations where accusations of Igbo monopoly of essential services to the exclusion of other ethnic nationalities held sway (Ibid: 172).

From the 1930s onwards, apart from the struggle for economic opportunities in urban centres, political developments began to take on an ethnic flavour, and the general trend towards the 'inequality of modernisation' between the Igbo and other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria had implications for the Igbo nation. This must be situated within the context of broader political developments in Nigeria during this period. The Igbo did not only constitute a formidable ethnic category, Igbo politics during this era coalesced around the influential and charismatic figure of Nnamdi Azikiwe who had just returned from the United States with a collection of degrees. Popularly referred to as 'Zik', he emerged as 'the most important and celebrated nationalist leader' on the west coast of Africa, if not in all of tropical Africa (Coleman 1958: 220). With his provocative and combative brand of journalism he initiated a new era in the nationalist struggle. Prior to the advent of Zik in Nigerian journalism and politics, the Igbo had lacked a symbol and spokesman to articulate their views, this explains why they largely remained at the

periphery of the nationalist struggle that was virtually dominated by their Southern rivals-the Yoruba (Ibid: 224).

In Lagos, the competition between the Igbo and Yoruba became intense owing to its centrality as the hotbed of the nationalist struggle. By the beginning of 1948, tensions between the Igbo and Yoruba were high resulting into press attacks on Azikiwe and on the Igbo people. These developments have been linked to the transformation of the Igbo State Union into a partisan political organisation in defence of Azikiwe and the Igbo cause (Uzoigwe 1999: 13). It is argued that the aggressive rise of the Igbo in the 1930s and 1940s colonial Nigeria constituted a threat to the Yoruba, since, Azikiwe, the main leader of the Igbo had his base and business in Lagos, a Yoruba city (Adebanwi 2004). Hence, the rise of Yoruba nationalism was intended to serve as a bulwark against these perceived threats and stem the tide of Igbo nationalism. Needless to say, the North made no pretences about its sectional interests. Due to the heterogeneity of the region, the Islamic theology and ideology, and the Hausa language was used as a binding force to hold the region together. However, the economic and educational underdevelopment of the North, made the existential threat of Southern domination in the event of independence from Britain more apparent. This threat was further heightened by the rising influx of Southerners (particularly Igbo) into urban centres in the North as railway workers, teachers and colonial civil servants, a situation which remained even after independence. Based on figures quoted by Paden (1971: 115) and Amaazee (1990: 281), in 1921, only 3,000 Igbo resided in Northern Nigeria, a figure which rose to 12,000 a decade later. In the 1950s, an estimated number of 127,000 Igbo

were residing in the North; 57,000 in the West; 32,000 in Lagos; and 10,000 in the then British Cameroons which was administered as a part of Nigeria. In a Northern report, titled: *The Nigerian Situation: Facts and Background* (1966: 25), the fear of Igbo domination was expressed in the fact that the Igbo accounted for forty-five percent of the manpower in the public services, 'threatening to reach sixty percent by 1968', while the North was credited with only ten percent of the existing posts. As at 1964, the Igbo occupied 270 out of 430 senior posts in the Nigerian Railway Corporation, and 73 out of 107 of the same in the Nigerian Ports Authority (Ibid: 559).

### **3.2.1. *The Impact of Colonial Policy***

Before the territory known as Nigeria came under complete colonial rule, the British had worked out a system of colonial administration for their tropical dependencies. This was the 'Crown Colony' system of administration which had already been tried and established in the West Indies and India. While imposing this system on colonial Nigeria, the British did not bother to reflect on the appropriateness of this system with the traditional system of government and administration in these territories (Olusanya 1980: 518; Tamuno 1966). But as events would prove the sheer size of Nigeria's territory, the absence of viable communication facilities and its ethnic diversity posed a problem for British colonial administration. Influenced by an undue sense of superiority, the British had considered it a divine duty to impose their own system on 'lesser breeds without law', and the pre-requisite for Western education as a condition for participation in the administration of the colony meant that a vast majority of Africans were left out of the system (Olusanya 1980: 518). This accounted for a string of policy

failures and the inability to properly integrate the North and South sections of the country which proved to be devastating to the cause of national unity in the years to come.

Beginning with the Clifford Constitution in 1922, the entire territory of Nigeria fell under two different administrative systems for twenty five years. The British colonial policy also cultivated the Hausa-Fulani/Islamist identity in the North by adopting a policy of 'separate development' for the region and regionalized virtually everything in order to promote mutually exclusive identities (Diamond 1988: 28). The introduction of the Richards Constitution in 1946, and the creation of a new Legislative Council brought together for the first time since 1923 Northern and Southern Nigeria. But the regionalisation exercise of the Richards Constitution did not resolve the issues at stake. The three regions that emerged as the administrative and political units of Nigeria were to coincide with the spatial locations of the three major ethnic-nationalities in Nigeria (the Hausa-Fulani in the North; the Yoruba in the West; and the Igbo in the East), a policy which in practice set the stage for the regionalisation of the nationalist movement into three mutually antagonistic groups. The point has been made that the British did not intend to divide the country with the Richards Constitution, but that the regions were administrative units intended to foster 'unity in diversity' before they were hijacked for political reasons by the nationalists (Olusanya 1980: 528). This was indeed, a watershed in constitutional developments in Nigeria and it set the tone for the enduring structure of Nigerian politics.

These regional divisions were to remain permanent and political with the creation of the Macpherson Constitution in 1951. The new constitution fully recognised each region as a political entity by granting them executive and legislative powers, the existing regional councils were transformed into Houses of Assembly, and each region was vested with powers to make laws for the peace, order and good government in its area of jurisdiction (Olusanya 1980: 532). Given the fact that ethnic identity politics was mounting in the country the constitution was short-lived and the elections which followed in 1951 revealed the regional divisions plaguing the country. In 1954 a new constitution was implemented which granted these regions self-government under regional prime ministers, and this was significant to the effect that it provided the basis for the constitution of independent Nigeria in 1960. It is plausible to support the view that the British and the Nigerian political elites did not intend to work towards a crisis-free Nigeria (Ayandele 1971: 97), and that uniting Nigeria was not the purpose of the British colonial enterprise (Obi 2002: 37). But the point remains to be made that while the British sowed the seeds of division between different ethnic groups in the country, the Nigerian political elites were obsessed with a stunted vision of securing their place in Nigeria's post-colonial setting and this limited their role to that of political secession, while inter-ethnic struggles intensified.



### **3.2.2. The Emergence of Political Organisations and the Tri-Polarisation of Nigerian Politics**

The split that occurred within the ranks of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1941, as a result of the Ikoli-Akinsanya dispute raised mutual suspicions, deepened ethno-nationalist inclinations and eroded the platform for articulating a coherent nationalist agenda in colonial Nigeria. Comprising some of the young intellectuals of the period,<sup>11</sup> the NYM was founded in 1936, and according to its 1938 Charter, its aim was to foster 'inter-ethnic harmony' as a precondition for national unity.<sup>12</sup> The disagreements over who should assume the leadership position in the movement pitched two factions against each other, one for Ernest Ikoli, the other for Samuel Akinsanya. On the one hand, Azikiwe led the faction against Ikoli, the nominated leader; on the other hand, Awolowo supported Ikoli's candidacy. Azikiwe's support for Akinsanya's candidacy was not necessarily based on ethnic grounds (since the latter is a Yoruba, while Azikiwe is Igbo), but had to do with an incipient challenge posed by the Ikoli's newspaper outfit which had begun to rival Azikiwe's *West Africa Pilot*, as the official newspaper of the movement. With the victory of Ikoli, Azikiwe and other Igbo members left the movement (Sklar 1963: 53-54). The struggle as it appears was mainly centred on personal and local issues, and what Azikiwe's perceived to be an unwelcomed challenge to his ambitions and interests within the ranks of the movement, and not about ethnic or sectional interests which both contending factions appealed to in the course of the

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<sup>11</sup> These include the likes of H.O Davies, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Vaughan, Dr. Kofo Abayomi and Obafemi Awolowo (Olusanya 1980: 558).

<sup>12</sup> PRO; CO 583 234/30386 Nigerian Youth Movement. *Youth Charter and Constitution and Rules* (Lagos 1938), cited in Bersselaar 1998: 90.

struggle. The fact that Azikiwe resigned his membership of the NYM with all Igbo members of the movement going along with him raised fears of an Igbo agenda for domination, and the nationalist movement suffered an ethnic split which dissipated the platform for a coherent nationalist struggle.

In August 1944, politicians of mainly southern Nigeria extraction founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) to spearhead the struggle for independence from British colonialism. The NCNC was essentially a federated party and the first nationalist party in the sense that its membership base cut across organisations, like the trade unions, cultural bodies, social clubs, literary circles, professional groups, and associations of constituent nationalities in Nigeria and southern Cameroon. Herbert Macaulay was elected the first president, and Azikiwe became the general secretary and used his widely read newspapers to publicise the NCNC's activities. In order to mobilise a truly national resistance against British colonialism, the NCNC embarked on a number of successful tours and rallies to conscientise the Nigerian masses. These rallies were widespread and the NCNC acquired a lot of popularity among the Nigerian population, particularly among the Igbo in the east. In its early days, the NCNC's campaign theme focused on achieving independence from Britain based on a commonwealth of semi-autonomous states of ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> This vision was espoused in the NCNC *Freedom Charter*, which advocated the founding ethnic state movements as the harbinger for later semi-autonomous states that would constitute the Nigerian commonwealth. Between 1944 and 1951, the NCNC dominated colonial politics, but the failure of its

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<sup>13</sup> See the *West Africa Pilot*, 28 August 1944, cited in Bersselaar 1998: 91.

leadership to leverage on this advantage and forestall the emergence of another party, at least in the South, led to the formation of the Action Group (AG) as a viable opposition to its dominance in the South (Olusanya 1980: 566).

The NCNC dominated nationalist politics and provided leadership for the nationalist cause up till 1951 when it came under severe threat from regional political parties formed in the West and in the North, namely, the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) respectively. The AG was founded in 1950, but was launched in 1951. The AG was openly declared a regional party and was based on a Yoruba socio-cultural association, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*,<sup>14</sup> which was founded in 1945. According to its leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the aim of the party was to harmonise and organise the nationalist movement in the Western Region within the aegis of the party, in order to foster unity and submit to party loyalty and discipline (Awolowo 1960: 179). As Olusanya (1980: 560) rightly observes, the founding of the AG can be linked to the need for collective action by the Yoruba, this was in view of the ability of the Igbo to reach a consensus spearheaded by Azikiwe which led to the ditching of the NYM and the closing of ranks on issues regarding principle and personality. Olusanya further adds that the advent of the AG on the Nigerian political landscape marked 'the beginning of active party organisation in Nigeria' (Olusanya 1980: 566). Prior to this time the only party that existed, the NCNC, had its membership based on group affiliations and not individual membership, and was not strictly speaking a real political party, but an agglomeration of different organisations, aimed at 'providing a medium of expression in order to secure

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<sup>14</sup> This means '*Society for the Descendants of Oduduwa*', the ancestral father of the Yoruba.

political freedom' (Azikiwe 1961: 10). The weaknesses, indiscipline and inactivity which characterised the NCNC from 1947 onwards eroded its dominance and propelled the AG to prominence, first as source of political mobilisation in the West, and later in the whole country (Awolowo 1960: 179).

Similar to the situation in the West, the Hausa-Fulani mobilised their sensibilities through the formation of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). The emergence of the NPC was based on the platform of a socio-cultural organisation known as, *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa* (JMA) founded in 1948. The membership of the NPC was limited to northerners and the motto of the party was 'One North, One People, Irrespective of Religion, Rank or Tribe' (Olusanya 1980: 567). The NPC drew massive support from wealthy traders and Northern political establishment, and a major objective of the party was to foster and protect Northern elite interests and aspirations, and to ensure Northern regional autonomy in the politics of the colonial era (Olusanya 1980: 567). Prior to this time, the North had been isolated and had kept away from party politics dominated by the South. The British had encouraged isolationism in the region and coupled with the relatively slow development of the region by virtue of the little or absence of western education, the North remained indifferent to political developments in the South (Olusanya 1980: 568). As constitutional changes which were targeted at the devolution of political power to Nigerians began to unfold, the NPC had to be formed to represent Northern interest and forestall Southern domination, and the British ensured that the emergent party had its roots in the conservative, *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa* (JMA) (Dudley 1968: 81).

### **3.2.3. The Role of Ethnic Unions**

As Nigeria approached independence, the political domain became very prominent and constituted the most immediate practical context for the mobilisation of divergent identities in the country. Ethnic identity became an instrument of political mobilisation and the role of ethnic unions in this political project was defined in terms of safeguarding their ethnic enclaves and projecting their particular identity in the struggle for independence. These tendencies became deeply entrenched with the emergence of AG and NPC in 1951 as exclusively regional parties, and the championing of ethnic nationalism and ethno-regional divisions by the three dominant ethnic unions: the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (EOO) in the West; *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa* (JMA) in the North; and the *Igbo State Union* (ISU) in the East that dominated the three regions in Nigeria. As Olusanya (1980: 568) notes, this impacted negatively on the nationalist struggle for independence, and as Chick (1971: 116) puts it:

*'once it became clear that the principle of political independence would be conceded, attacks upon the colonial authorities were overshadowed by a struggle for succession in which politicians and newspapermen alike were deeply involved. The cohesion of the nationalist front was gradually undermined as Igbo and Yoruba leaders manoeuvred for dominant positions within the organisation. ...Eventually, rivalry between ethnic blocs in the South was partially submerged by the more profound clash of Southern interest with those of the emergent North'.*

It is against this background that this study views the formation of the Igbo State Union vis-à-vis other ethnic unions existing in the country at the time.

Initial attempts at the formation of an Igbo union date back to the 1920s and 1930s when unsuccessful attempts were made in major Nigerian cities like Lagos, Aba and Port-Harcourt to initiate a general Igbo union (Azikiwe 1970: 236-238; Ahanotu 1982: 166). In 1933, the quest for the establishment of an Igbo union was stated in a letter published in the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph* which voiced the 'rebirth of the dying embers of Igbo national zeal' (Ota 1995: 75). In 1944, the Igbo Federal Union was launched during an Igbo mass meeting, where Azikiwe argued that 'the Igbo had not been united because of superstition and ignorance, and that the Igbo, blessed as they were with natural resources, land and manpower, as well as a common language, could achieve a great deal if they would unite' (*West African Pilot* 19. 6. 1944 cited in Bersselaar 1998: 267). The Union claimed to be pan-Nigerian, and even pan-African, but it had an Igbo national anthem, planned to establish an Igbo bank and an Igbo education scheme (*West African Pilot*, 23. 1. 1946 cited in Bersselaar 1998: 268), and was closely aligned with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). Its membership was mainly made up of the educated elites: professionals, businessmen and politicians.

In 1949, the Igbo Federal Union was converted into the Igbo State Union. The formation of the Igbo State Union was based on an explicit political aim to 'organise the Igbo linguistic group into a political unit, and in accordance with the NCNC Freedom Charter' (*West African Pilot* 4. 1. 1949 cited in Bersselaar 1998: 269). In an address on the 'Self-Determination of the Igbo' delivered by Azikiwe who was the president of the union, he pointed to the victimisation and marginalisation of the Igbo nation in Nigeria and described the Igbo as 'the most hated in Nigeria'. The address also highlighted the quest

for the self-determination of the Igbo 'to suffer wrong no more', and that this was achievable along the lines of the NCNC Freedom Charter (Harris 1961: 242-246). Other issues involved the objective of unifying the Igbo group to 'include every bit of Igboland in the Igbo state', and the need to draw up an official constitution for the Igbo state taking into cognisance the various customary laws from different parts of the Igboland.<sup>15</sup> The NCNC Freedom Charter expressed Azikiwe's views of an independent Nigeria as a federation of autonomous ethnically-defined states, including states for the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Efik (Sklar 1963: 63). This view was also expressed at the Pan-Igbo Conference on 'The Place of the Igbo State in the NCNC Freedom Charter', where Azikiwe stated that the main aim of the Igbo State Union was to restructure the Nigerian federation and not to propose the unilateral secession of the Igbo from the federation (*West African Pilot* 12. 8. 1955 cited in Bersselaar 1998: 269). The declaration of Azikiwe and the Igbo in general was highly political, and this initiated an appeal to the Igbo to reject the status quo in colonial Nigeria.

For the Yoruba ethnic group, the unification of the Yoruba, the creation of the idea of a single Yoruba nation throughout Yorubaland; the acceleration of a modern and efficient Yoruba state within the Nigerian federation; and the encouragement of the creation of associations capable of achieving these aims were crucial to the survival of the Yoruba nation (Awolowo 1960: 168-169). These tendencies were hatched shortly after World War II in 1945, when Obafemi Awolowo and a group of educated Yoruba elites formed

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<sup>15</sup> NAE; ONDIST 12/1/2094 Minutes of the Ibo State Assembly held at Aba, 25 and 26 June 1949, cited in Bersselaar 1998: 272.

the 'Egbe Omo Oduduwa' a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group in London, which was later transformed into the Action Group (AG). The group was formally inaugurated in 1948 as a cultural society in Ile Ife,<sup>16</sup> and with the demise of the NYM some Yoruba politicians who disagreed with Azikiwe rallied to the banner of this pan-Yoruba cultural group in order to form the basis for a new party if Azikiwe and the NCNC were to be challenged in colonial politics. The mobilisation of the groups branches across Yorubaland formed the basis of the AG which emerged fully in 1951 (Okpu 1977: 53).

Prior to this time, the *Daily Trust* had captured the ethnic rivalry and mood during this era when on October 17, 1944, it reported that:

*'We anticipate..... an era of wholesome rivalry among the principal tribes of Nigeria..... (and), while they must guide against chauvinism and rabid tribalism, the great Yoruba people must strive to preserve their individuality'* (cited in Coleman 1958: 345).

In several statements, some of which demands a recall, the leadership of the EOO reiterated the need to articulate a Yoruba agenda and safeguard the Yoruba nation against the perceived threat from other ethnic groups in Nigeria. In 1948, Sir Adeyemo Alakija, the president of the EOO, was quoted as saying that:

*'This Big Tomorrow ... (for the Yoruba) is the future of our children ... How they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria. How the Yoruba will not be relegated to the background in the future'* (quoted in Coleman 1958: 346).

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<sup>16</sup> Ile Ife is generally regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba, and that of Oduduwa their cultural hero and mythical progenitor.



This was believed to be a tacit reference to the rise of the Igbo during this period. A rather belligerent remark was credited to one of the leading members of the EOO, Oluwole Alakija, who stated that:

*'We were bunched together by the British who named us Nigeria. We never knew the Igbo, but since we came to know them, we have tried to be friendly and neighbourly. Then came the Arch Devil (Azikiwe) to sow the seeds of distrust and hatred .... We have tolerated enough from a class of Igbo and addle-brained Yoruba who have mortgaged their thinking caps to Azikiwe and his hirelings'* (quoted in Coleman 1958: 346).

In reaction to these developments, the animosity between the Igbo and the Yoruba grew worse, and some radical supporters of both groups were said to have mobilised and armed themselves for a confrontation. The Azikiwe-owned *West African Pilot* also mobilised and warned that:

*'Henceforth, the cry must one battle against Egbe Omo Oduduwa: its leaders at home and abroad, uphill and down dale, in the streets of Nigeria and in the residences of its advocates ... It is the enemy of Nigeria; it must be crushed to the earth ... There is no going back, until the fascist organisation of Sir Adeyemo Alakija has been dismembered'* (cited in Coleman 1958: 346).

These statements captured some of the deep-seated animosities and grievances between both groups, resulting in the intensification of Igbo-Yoruba distrust.

The situation in Northern Nigeria was not different. Since there was a desire by the Northern establishment to safeguard the rights of the privileged class and contain the AG and NCNC, and other influences from the South, they also had to mobilise based on

a regional identity. In 1948, a group of Hausa elites formed the *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa* (JMA), meaning an association of the Northern people. The NPC was to emerge based on the platform of this socio-cultural organisation, with the motto: 'One North, One People, Irrespective of Religion, Rank or Tribe'. The political and administrative composition of the North, unlike the situation in the East and West, was conducive to the formation of such an umbrella organisation. This is attributed to the fact that in the North the unit of organisation was the compound, several of which made up a ward; a collection of wards made up a village; a collection of villages made up a fief; a fief together with the main towns and administrative centres formed a state under the absolute rule of an emir; and the emir's state constituted only a vassal to the caliphate and the Sultan (Dudley 1968: 49-50). These compact units which linked the Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate through vassalage to the territories in the North informed the source of the slogan, it was also used to provide a legal justification to mobilise the support of other ethnic nationalities within the region to support the NPC. The NPC initially remained largely conservative and unwilling to transform into a full-fledged political party until a radical wing led by Aminu Kano split from the main group to form the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). This development threatened the power structures of the Northern Authorities, and the need to engage and adapt to the prevailing power politics became evident if it would remain in power.

### **3.3. Contentious Politicisation of Ethno-Nationalist Identities and the Spectre of National Disintegration**

In practical terms, the years between 1948 and 1952 were accentuated by the contentious politicisation of ethno-nationalist identities in Nigeria. Three factors accounted for this: first, the formation of the AG and NPC as bearers of sectional interests in the country; second, the intensification of ethnic rivalry and partisan politics through the activities of the three dominant ethno-regional socio-cultural organisations; and third, the cross-carpeting incident in the Western House of Assembly.<sup>17</sup> A major thrust in Igbo nationalism led by Azikiwe was to mobilise the Igbo into a unified, cohesive and political bloc. At the same time, Azikiwe also aspired to assume the leadership role of not only a pan-Nigerian nationalist movement, but its pan-African version as well. Though, contradictory in terms and mutually exclusive, Azikiwe did not perceive Igbo nationalism and Nigerian nationalism as conflicting goals, but as dual sources of inspiration in the struggle against colonialism. In the light of these developments, his presidency of the Igbo State Union further compounded the issue. As part of his presidential address at the first Igbo State Union conference in 1949, Azikiwe expressed the 'Manifest Destiny' of the Igbo in the struggle against colonialism in terms that were strikingly hegemonic, when he declared that:

*'It would appear that the God of Africa has created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages ..... The martial prowess of the Igbo nation at all stages of human history has enabled them not only to conquer others but also adapt themselves to the role of*

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<sup>17</sup> On this occasion the mobilization of an anti-Igbo programme by the AG led to the defeat of Azikiwe in the Western House and forced him to abandon his position as the leader of opposition in that legislature.

*preserver ..... The Igbo nation cannot shirk its responsibility' (Crowder 1962: 228).*

In addition, the address appealed to the Igbo that:

*'These things shall be; a mighty nation shall rise again in the West of the Sudan, with love of freedom in their sinews; and it shall come to pass that the Ibo shall emerge, to suffer wrong no more, and to re-write the history written by their ancestors. It is the voice of Destiny and we must answer this call for freedom and respect in our life-time. The God of Africa has willed it. It is the handwriting on the wall. It is our manifest destiny' (Azikiwe 1961: 246-249).*

This statement has been interpreted as a clarion call for the 'Igbo said to be without history, without culture and incapable of building large states and empires' to shake off the lethargies of the past and rally together as one people to articulate a future agenda (Uzoigwe 1999: 14). But these remarks marked a watershed in ethnic relations in colonial Nigeria and represent an important moment in the promotion of Igbo identity in colonial Nigeria in a number of ways. First, it helped to mobilise and increase the reach of the Igbo nationalists who deployed the Igbo State Union as a means of engaging the entire population defined as 'Igbo' and inculcating the need to have an Igbo nation. Second, Azikiwe's choice of narrative which describes the vision for the future of the Igbo as 'the voice of destiny', willed by the 'God of Africa', highlighted the fact that the Igbo have a choice in making their future, and carved a role for him as a political prophet and saviour of the Igbo (Ike 1950: 16-17; Coleman 1958: 290; Obiechina 1973: 91). Third, Azikiwe's preoccupation with Igbo emancipation through the

medium of the Igbo State Union secured his status as the leader of the Igbo and guaranteed the support of the Igbo for NCNC policies.

These developments raised suspicions about Azikiwe's nationalist credentials among the non-Igbo. One of his main rivals, Chief Awolowo was quick to point out that Azikiwe's popularity among the Igbo positioned him as an ethnically biased fellow who wants the Igbo to dominate Nigeria. Awolowo maintained that 'in spite of his protestations to the contrary, Dr. Azikiwe himself is an unabashed Igbo jingoist. And he gave the game completely away...in his presidential address to the Igbo State Union in 1949' (Awolowo 1960: 172). It was precisely against this background that the link between 'Igbo identity', the ensuing ethno-nationalist rivalries between the three dominant groups and the ultimate impact of these struggles for political power was made. More so, it lent the tri-polar ethnic power struggle a much broader appeal by giving it the face of a zero-sum contest and brought into sharper focus the potential ethno-regional rivalries that engulfed the country at independence.

At another level, it is important to note that what appeared to be an Igbo-led project or a pan-Nigerian nationalist movement led by Azikiwe was in part elite-based, and in part sought accommodation with the colonial project. The nationalist elites saw themselves as 'determinate hegemonic forces' (Fontana 1993: 32) with the ability to transform the power, position and privileges of their groups, but they also relished their place in Nigeria's political future when it became apparent that independence was imminent. Indeed, when the 'Zikist Movement', a small group of crack, dedicated and

conspiratorial socialists, who were inspired by Azikiwe and his writings, tried to radicalise the anti-colonial struggle they were disowned by Azikiwe and were effectively crushed by the colonial administration (Olusanya 1966: 331; Okoye 1981, Iweriebor 1996). It has to be recalled the one of the greatest setbacks of the 'Zikist Movement' was the hostility of nationalist elites from every quarter towards their activities, discrediting them as hot-headed and irresponsible youths for the perceived fear of being supplanted by youth. This rejection would have been understandable had it not come from Azikiwe himself who had contributed more than any other person to the development of political awakening during this period, providing the youths with their revolutionary passion and firing them to defend him against his enemies, while he was not ready to thread the 'path of revolution' himself (Okoye 1981: 141). Though, Azikiwe and the nationalist elites (including Awolowo) paid lip service to the socialist ideology, they were core capitalists and professional politicians who had private businesses which they ran at a profit. Hence, their opposition to colonialism cannot be equated as an opposition to capitalism. This largely explains why their brand of politics was characterised by 'accommodation' with the colonial project and an orderly transfer of power from the British to the Nigerian nationalist elites at independence.

### **3.5. Post-Civil War Igbo Identity: A Hypothesis of Ethnic Exclusion**

The events leading the Nigerian Civil War are sufficiently familiar to require any re-narration here. It is apposite to state that the Nigeria-Biafra War marks a watershed in Igbo identity and nationalism in Nigeria, and connects tightly to the re-invention of Igbo nationalism in contemporary Nigeria which makes it a central aspect of this research.

However, owing to the fact that there has been a proliferation of different studies on the war since it ended in 1970, this study will not engage in an exhaustive examination of the war here. Rather, it will attempt to highlight the major developments that led to the war with the aim of revisiting or drawing inferences from them in closer detail in the course of this study. It is important to note that after decades of intense political contestations along ethno-regional lines, Nigeria's nation-building project had stalled even before take-off and the structure of its federal experiment had collapsed, ushering in a host of other crises like the emergency rule in the Western region in 1962, the census crisis of 1962/1963, the election crisis of 1964/1965, and finally, the intervention of the military in January 1966 and a counter-coup six months later.

The Igbo paid a huge price for the ethnic sentiments and chauvinism that characterised this period with the loss of lives and properties in different parts of the country. This produced a wave of migration of Igbo back to their homeland in Eastern Nigeria. After disagreements between General Gowon who was in charge of the Federal Military Government, and Colonel Ojukwu who was the Military Governor of the Eastern Region over the interpretation of the Aburi Accord and what political structure Nigeria should adopt, there was a suspension of an orderly process of negotiation, the central government lost its effective authority over the Eastern region and the region seceded from the main federation declaring its independence as the Republic of Biafra on the 30 May, 1967. The secession was backed by military force and the ensuing conflict ended with the collapse of Biafra in January 1970. This effectively halted the Igbo challenge in Nigeria.

This study argues that the end of the war in 1970 ushered in three distinct phases in the post-war historiography of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria: the immediate phase focused on the resettlement, rehabilitation and reintegration of the Igbo into the Nigerian project; this was followed by the state creation phase under which the Igbo area and the only core Igbo state (East Central State) was progressively split into two, three and more states; and the last phase in this category captures Igbo agitations at the elite level to address the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria, its share of the national patrimony, and the growing concerns about marginalisation, injustice and underdevelopment by the hegemonic group(s) that controlled federal power and oil resources in Nigeria. These demands were replete within the context of the prolonged economic crisis and the adoption of the structural adjustment programme in the country.

At the end of the war in 1970, the impact of the defeat of the Igbo was to be cushioned by the 'no winner, no vanquished' mantra of the Federal Military Government (FMG) in power. The institutional agenda of the 'Three Rs – Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction' shaped the post-civil war Nigerian public space. This was marked by the magnanimity of the FMG in pronouncements that guaranteed the personal safety and security of the Igbo and their properties; the right to reside and work anywhere in Nigeria; the re-absorption of public civil servants of Igbo extraction into the civil service and the military; and the granting of general amnesty to the Igbo. This is probably the only armed conflict of its magnitude in history, perpetrated with so much viciousness and bitterness, where no reprisals, trials or execution occurred. On the contrary, the



marginalisation, alienation and distancing of the Igbo from the mainstream of national political and economic processes were observable from events at the national level. In a sense, the institutional and structural context of Igbo marginalisation after the civil war bore semblance to the existence of an 'unofficial policy' by the federal government to punish the Igbo for their secessionist attempt in order to forestall a future recurrence from any section of the country. This trend was replete in the FMG-instituted Abandoned Properties Implementation Committee (APIC) which presided over the sale of Igbo properties outside Igboland, and in parts of the former Eastern Region (Port-Harcourt), at ridiculously low prices to indigenes of those states who claimed to have captured them during the war. Of similar importance was the 'Twenty Pound Scandal' and the Banking Obligation (Eastern States) Decree of 1970 which did not recognize any deposits made into bank accounts within the former Eastern Region from May 30, 1967 up till January 12, 1970 (Nwabueze 1985). This string of policies came to a head with the Indigenization Decree of 1972 which reviewed the ownership structure and control of Nigerian enterprises, and compelled foreign companies to sell part of their shares to Nigerians at a time when the Igbo had barely recovered from the effects of the war and were still perceived to be economically emasculated. With the implementation of these policies, the balance of power quickly shifted in favour of the two other dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, and thus, the Igbo who constitute a major ethnic group and one vital leg in the tripod prior to 1966 became severely marginalised. Almost Four decades afterwards, the dominant perception is that the Igbo nation is yet to be re-integrated into the Nigerian project, and these views have attracted extensive discussions in

academic literature (Ikpeze 2000; Ojukwu 2009; Duruji 2009). The 'perceived' structural and institutional marginalisation of the Igbo in the post-war settlements explains why they have dominated the informal sector which requires operating outside state laws (Albert 1993).

Another prominent feature of the post-civil war Nigerian public space was a brand of Igbo nationalism that demanded accommodation and integration, and subsequently, a clamour and struggle for greater access and control over state resources by various factions of the power elite. This tendency was instigated by the 'distributive imperatives' and re-organisations which occurred through the modification of the Distributive Pool Account (DPA) in 1970. Under the new formula, 50 percent of the DPA resources were shared equally among states, while the other 50 percent went proportionally to their populations, thereby, benefitting those regions that had been split into more states. Elite clamour and agitation during this period found expression in state creation, as 'statehood' became an important factor in the in the allocation of a wider range of social opportunities in the Nigerian federation (Suberu 1991: 500). Notably, before the eruption of war between the federal government and the secessionist Eastern region in June 1967, the Federal Military Government had made a tactical move in which the existing four regions (North, East, West and Mid-West) were abolished and replaced with twelve states. In pragmatic terms, this was a move calculated to undermine Ojukwu/Biafra's claim to oil in the Niger Delta. The creation of two states (Rivers and South-Eastern States) out of the former Eastern region effectively staved-off Ojukwu's claims to oil in the region from which he had instructed oil

multinationals to 'pay rents, royalties and other affiliates to his government' (Ikein and Briggs-Anigbo 1998: 128).

Clearly, the political rationale for the creation of states that characterised the pre-civil war era was to be compounded after the civil war to reflect distributive pressures, sectional anxieties, partisan conflicts, constitutional controversies and institutional dilemmas, all inter-locking the issue of state re-organisation and an increased share of federal resources within Nigeria (Suberu 1991; Alapiki 2005). After the 1967 state creation exercise, successive demands for the creation of new states also moved beyond the exclusive preserve of minority ethnic groups, to include demands by elites from the three dominant ethnic groups who began to stake their claims in a bid to secure more access and control to federal resources. For the Igbo, there were clamours for the creation of New Anambra, Wawa and Adada from Anambra State; Aba and Njaba from Imo State; Ebonyi from parts of Imo and Anambra States; and Anioma from the Igbo-speaking areas of Bendel State (Suberu 1991: 503). The argument of the Igbo elites derived from a widely shared perception that the establishment of only two Igbo states from the 1976 state-creation exercise, as against the creation of five states each in the Hausa/Fulani (Northern Region) and the Yoruba (Western Region) had put the Igbo at a huge disadvantage in the competition for socio-economic and political opportunities in the federation, and cannot make for peace and harmony in the country. As a leading Igbo constitutional lawyer puts it: 'until this anomaly is corrected to create a fair balance between the three main tribes (of Nigeria) the prospects of harmony and stability in the country will remain shaky' (Nwabueze 1983: 307). Since the last exercise in 1976,

subsequent exercises have led to the creation of 21 states (1987); 30 states (1991); and 36 states (1996). Still out of 36 states and six geopolitical zones presently in place, the Igbo dominated Southeast remains the only zone with five states, while other zones have six or seven states each. Presently, Igbo in the South East have continued to clamour for the parity of states and equal local government areas with other regions, citing an instance where the South East have five states and 95 Local Government Areas compared to the seven states and 188 Local Government Areas in the North West.

The long-drawn global economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s did cast a complexion on the economic conditions in the country, and the introduction of structural adjustment as a response to these crises widened the existing cleavages and ethno-nationalist identities became more conflictive and competitive. This period witnessed an unprecedented surge in the number and activities of ethnic unions in various forms, such as, 'development' unions, 'progressive' unions, 'hometown' associations, social clubs, community development associations, cultural organisations, and 'migrant ethnic empires' which emerged to meet new challenges (Osaghae 1995: 5). These developments could be attributed to the fact that the introduction of the adjustment programme signalled the retrenchment of the state from most areas of private life, and the intensification of ethnic conflicts was borne of struggles over resources, access to power and local autonomy which was intensified under conditions of recession, depression, scarcity and immiseration all of which was captured under the rubric of the adjustment package (Chazan 1986). Certainly, the breadth of the adjustment programme was such that its implementation impacted fundamentally on

every area of social, political and economic relations, and ultimately, on ethno-nationalist consciousness which provides a context for these relations.

In response to the famous axiom 'What else is development other than helping your hometown' (Southall 1998), Diaspora Igbo organisations, unions and community development associations in urban centres throughout the country began to mobilise capital through self-help efforts to provide social services and amenities for their constituencies. As 'push came to shove' with SAP, diminishing resources and opportunities intensified the competition for jobs, contracts and other benefits, and the level of ethnic consciousness and ethnic connections became the hallmark of negotiation in the Nigerian public space. The commercialisation and privatisation exercise attendant to the adjustment package reinforced factional struggles for resources and power at the elite level in Nigeria, thereby, fuelling tension, mistrust and conflict between the 'winners' and the 'losers'. This also provided a fertile ground for the resurgence of ethnicity as a mobilising or organising factor in the struggle for the acquisition of state-divested shares in government enterprises. Being aware of the growing concerns about marginalisation, injustice and underdevelopment in East, and the dominance of the hegemonic group(s) that controlled federal power and oil resources, there was a push at the Igbo elite level to address the 'Igbo Question' and its share of the national patrimony. Prominent Igbo groups, like '*Ohaneze Ndi Igbo*'<sup>18</sup> and '*Aka Ikenga*' (a pan-Igbo socio-cultural think-tank), through various fora began to

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<sup>18</sup> *Ohanaeze* means 'the people and the leaders- the entire community or nation.

articulate the plight of the Igbo within the unfolding context, and the need to accommodate the Igbo in the Nigerian project.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted a discussion of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial evolution and development of Igbo identity as a background to understanding broader issues related to Igbo nationalism in contemporary Nigeria. The pre-colonial context shows that elements of the Igbo culture were shared by diverse groups which inhabit what is today considered as Igboland. The colonial period starting from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century provided the context for the definition of the Igbo territory and a pan-Igbo identity. Of crucial importance in this respect is that the colonial context also initiated a range of policies and programmes which altered the political landscape and the tenor nationalist politics. These developments led to the prominence of ethnic identities in Nigeria, including the forging of an Igbo ethnic identity in colonial Nigeria. The emergence of 'political Igbo nationalism' prior to independence became central and served as a basis for Igbo mobilisation for secession from the Nigerian state into a different political and administrative arrangement between 1967 and 1970. Hence, this chapter provides the necessary background for issues that will emerge in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MASSOB and Emergent Forms of Igbo Nationalism

#### 4.0. Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is clear that post-civil war developments in Nigeria, to a considerable extent, impacted on the Igbo perception of marginalisation within a federation it perceives as structured against its interests. Equally important in this respect is the mobilisation of ethno-nationalist sentiments and a certain reading of Nigeria's post-civil war history by the Igbo which forms the basis of the continued relevance of what has become known as the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria. To be sure, the 250 ethnic nationalities (or more) in Nigeria have continued to experience uneasy relations since independence, and relations between the supposed 'mega ethnic-nationalities'- the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East- have been central to the 'tri-polar' power struggle in Nigeria's post-independence politics.

Nigeria's ethnic diversity has largely resulted into the crystallization of an unstable polity and this has had obvious repercussions for cohesion and nation-building. A closer examination of the Nigerian condition suggests that diversity itself is a key contributor to conflict and competition among its different ethnic identities, but it is not necessarily the only condition for conflict. This means that a country's diversity in terms of its ethnic, communal, religious and racial groups does not necessarily produce conflicts or make them inevitable, rather conflict can be traced to how these factors are linked to each other (Osaghae and Suberu 2005). The latter observation is buttressed by Fearon

and Laitin (2003) who associate violent conflicts directly with poverty and other conditions that favour insurgency, and not necessarily to the degree of ethnic or religious diversity. Examples from some of the most diverse countries in the world like Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia and Tanzania show that these countries enjoy relative peace, while countries like Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda and Sri Lanka which are least divided in terms of their ethnic composition have exhibited severe forms of conflict. Studies in diversity and conflict have also identified the role of formal and informal institutions for conflict regulation, the different sizes of ethnic groups relative to a national arena, and the degree to which different identities overlap with each other, whether class, regional, religious or ethnic-based (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Horowitz 1985; Posner 2004; Weingast 1997).

The foregoing implies the need to interrogate discourses of national politics, identity struggles and contentions as it relates to national power and resources, and the character of nationhood and the national question in Nigeria. A contextual and historical interrogation of the flows, ebbs and changes involved in this process is intended to set the parameters that will guide the analysis of the Igbo experience, and to discern the linkages of how Igbo identity is mobilised and politicised in Nigeria. The important point about these developments is that the expression of ethno-nationalist tendencies has attained maximum intensity in contemporary Nigeria, particularly, since its return to civil rule in 1999. For the Igbo, prior to the opening up of Nigeria's public space in 1999, the major public discourse on the Igbo centred on how they could be assimilated fully into the Nigerian political process (Duruji 2009: 56). But since the return to civil rule a



decade ago, renewed expressions of Igbo nationalism have assumed a radical character with the emergence of various neo-Biafran groups and organisations calling for the disengagement of the Igbo from the Nigerian project into a different political and administrative arrangement known as the 'Republic of Biafra'.

This chapter examines various strands of contemporary Igbo nationalism (both reactionary and revolutionary), and the nature of debates, issues and discourses that this mould of nationalism has engendered. The first section of the paper examines the background to the 'Igbo Question' and emergent form of Igbo nationalism in contemporary Nigeria, with a view to understanding the current reinvention process and how it unravelled within the context of post-transition Nigeria. The second aims at understanding the emergence of MASSOB and its struggle for self-determination. This involves an examination of its origins and objectives; membership, structure and tactics; key activities of the movement; and its attempt to undertake parallel structures of governance in Igbo land. The third focuses on the encounters and clashes between MASSOB and the Nigerian state. Despite its self-professed non-violent posture, the movement has engaged in violent clashes with government authorities which have led to the loss of lives on both sides. Finally, the last section explores other actors, variants and alternative streams of Igbo nationalism as represented by elite-led Igbo groups. As opposed to MASSOB, these groups postulate a less radical or revolutionary brand of Igbo nationalism, but are more reactionary and seek for an engagement in the political process. These themes will guide the analysis in the following sections of the paper.

#### **4.1. Background: The 'Igbo Question' and Emergent Forms of Igbo Nationalism in Nigeria**

Certain developments at the national level were crucial to the emergent forms of Igbo nationalism and the resurgent quest for self-determination in Nigeria. The issues that have framed the 'Igbo Question' relates to the situations, policies and actions that produce grievances, and the overwhelming feeling of the deprivation of 'nationhood' and Igbo belonging within the context of the present political arrangement in Nigeria. Critical to the reinvention of Igbo nationalism and the formation of MASSOB is a particular version of Nigeria's political history that draws heavily from events succeeding the civil war. A central understanding is that there is an orchestrated and elaborate attempt by the Hausa-Fulani power elite to displace the 'tripod balance theory'<sup>19</sup> and perpetually emasculate the Igbo. As Osaghae (2001) rightly points out, certain post-civil war developments, and perceptions of Igbo marginalization by successive military regimes in the 1980s and 1990s in Nigeria have led to the redefinition of the Igbo, from being a majority ethnic group, to a minority ethnic group.

Nevertheless, it is critical to flag some of the rapid transformations at the local and global contexts which shaped the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria. At the local level, apart from the social and economic hardships occasioned by SAP and the far-reaching changes it brought to the economic and political landscape in the country between 1986 and 1993, the convoluted democratic transition programme initiated by the General Ibrahim

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<sup>19</sup> The tripod balance theory is based on the notion that if power is shared among Nigeria's three mega ethnic nationalities (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) it would provide a veritable basis for power-sharing and national stability.

Babangida administration ushered in profound structural and contextual changes in the political system. As part of a grand design to transform himself into a civilian president and hang on to power, General Babangida contrived hiccups and manipulations in the transition process which resulted in frequent disqualification of candidates and cancellation of presidential primaries, and ultimately, the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Elections. Described as 'one of the most sustained exercises in political chicanery' (Joseph 1993), General Babangida's transition programme did not only expose the attempt by the military to cling on to power, it was also a clear evidence that the geo-political Hausa-Fulani North was not intent on relaxing its grip on the levers of political power at the national level. A remarkable aspect of this election and its outcome was that Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim from the South, chose Babagana Kingibe, another Muslim from the North as his running mate, and the fact that an all-Muslim ticket won overwhelmingly in the North and South was hailed as unprecedented. Ake (2000:106) described it as revolutionary in the sense that it 'demonstrated capacity of democracy to override the parochial identities, especially ethnic, religious and regional identities, which the Nigerian political class had inculcated studiously for nearly half a century to divide and exploit ordinary Nigerians'.

Furthermore, the June 12 1993 Presidential Elections provided the public space for a realistic articulation of various national issues confronting Nigeria, and its significance was well understood by the military and the Nigerian political elites at large. Following the annulment, a monumental crisis ensued, and the resurgence of ethno-regional conflicts, separatist agitations and apprehensions about the outbreak of a civil war

stretched the country to a breaking point. The national impasse that followed the struggle to validate the results of the election pitched the South, particularly the Yoruba West, against the Hausa-Fulani North. At this point, many Easterners of Igbo ethnic extraction began to make their way to the East in order to forestall the re-occurrence of a similar scenario when many of them were trapped outside their home region prior to the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War in 1967. The perception that the Hausa-Fulani had resolved to emasculate other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria was enhanced by the self-secession bid of the late General Sanni Abacha who assumed power in a bloodless military coup against the Interim National Government (ING), headed by another Yoruba Southerner, Ernest Shonekan in November of the same year. By the time General Abacha rolled out a new transition programme after aborting General Babangida's unfinished transition, it became apparent that Nigeria had delved into a new phase of military adventurism. In a show of tacit support for the Abacha regime, some Northern politicians were quoted (Ake 2000:107) to have advanced the argument that in the past military regimes in Nigeria had disqualified candidates and cancelled elections, and that if Abiola insists on claiming his mandate, then past Northern leaders (Tafawa Balewa and Shehu Shagari) who had their electoral mandate terminated by coup d'états could also reclaim their mandates. Following these developments, ethnic relations within the country deteriorated badly and ethnicity regained some of the grounds it had lost in the elections. Apart from entrenching the specter of a permanent destabilisation of the 'tri-polar' ethnic power structure, the June 12 1993 debacle set the stage for the emergence of contemporary Igbo nationalism and aspirations, couched

in terms of self-determination, as the Igbo nation began to re-negotiate its national identity and re-assert itself in new ways in the Nigerian public space.

In order to articulate and realise this vision, prominent Igbo groups embarked on broadening the social base of the struggle and connecting to other ethnic groups in Nigeria through the Ethnic Nationalities Movement (ENM) which was established in 1994. By placing emphasis on ethnic groups rather than regions, the organization sought to address the urgent need for plural democracy and balance of power in Nigeria through dialogue among its multiethnic components. While these developments transpired, the visible political asymmetry and the necessity for power shift from the North to the South were heavily reflected in the debate during this period. The historical context for this was based on the claim that prior to 1999, Nigeria has had ten heads of government out of which the only two that were elected were from the North. Even the so-called military interventions featured military officers of Northern extraction. Discussions about breaking up the federation under the Abacha regime were rife, the situation that was to be remedied by a rare consensus among the political elites from different sections of the country to finally lay to rest the ghost of Northern domination, at least for the time being. What emerged as the price of 'Nigerian unity' was the 'zoning' of the presidency to the Yoruba South, if only to assuage the effects of the annulment of which a Yoruba was a victim and to prevent political disintegration.

The resurgence of contemporary Igbo nationalism in the Nigerian public space also appropriated developments and discourses of self-determination at the global level in

their quest to empower local claims and resistance, and re-negotiate the basis of Igbo citizenship in Nigeria. The principle of self-determination emerged after World War I and World War II as justification for some of the most far-reaching political realignments in recent international history. With the collapse of empire, the principle was invoked in the quest for the abolition of European overseas possessions in Africa, Asia, Pacific South America and the Caribbean. Although, ethno-nationalist claims for self-determination thrived during the Cold War, the East-West ideological face-off rendered it inconspicuous, and little or no attention was paid to the nature of independent states in Africa and the fate of minority ethnic nationalities within the states. But the debate on self-determination received a new meaning following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia. These developments were marked by the disintegration of large federations and multi-ethnic states, such as, the USSR, Yugoslavia, the re-unification of Germany, and the rather peaceful settlement and separation between the Czech and Slovak republics. These waves of nationalist resurgence drew heavily on the right to self-determination to justify the assertion of minority rights within large federations.

These developments, occurring as they did within the context of Africa's crises of state legitimacy and governance led a wave of transformations on which the forces of national and local changes played themselves out on the continent. The delegitimisation of one-party rule and military regimes in the face of a virtual disappearance of super-power rivalries which had previously aligned with these tendencies in the past meant that African states had to open up the political space to

accommodate hitherto suppressed groups and forces. These developments were greeted by partial successes for democracy which threw up contending forces, both revolutionary and reactionary. While new parties emerged and won power through multi-party elections, sit-tight and incumbent regimes also won elections by manipulating the state and electoral machinery, or by out-rightly dividing or subverting the opposition. Under this banner the principle of self-determination was invoked in support of the struggles of the oppressed African racial majority in apartheid South Africa, ushering in the first multi-party elections in the country in 1994. On a global scale, these developments altered the internal dynamics and stability of a number of fragile states, and remarkably threw up a number of self-determination movements.

#### ***4.1.1. Post-Transition Nigeria and the Current Reinvention Process***

Since Nigeria's return to civil rule on 29 May 1999, there have been interstices of democratic gains and unprecedented levels of violence, tension and insecurity. Unlike any other period in its post-colonial history, return to civil rule opened up the public space and unleashed a host of hitherto suppressed and dormant forces in the country, leading to a noticeable upsurge in the outbreak of ethnic, communal and religious conflicts (Adebanwi 2004; Agbu 2004), with dire consequences for national security (Akinyele 2001: 264-5; Nolte 2004: 61). Closely associated with these developments is the emergence of ethno-nationalist groups and ethnic militias within the expanded 'democratic' space, and the unleashing of a host of hitherto repressed and dormant political forces in the country, with each group staking its claims and seeking to re-assert its identity in the struggles against the perceived exclusion from access to

power and resources. Though, the long years of military rule in Nigeria did not eliminate ethno-nationalist consciousness; it however, succeeded only in curbing its conflictual manifestations to some extent. As Ake (2000: 105) notes, the failure of military rule to eliminate the propensity of ethnic consciousness was a consequence of the fact that it blocked democratic aspirations and the space to ventilate group grievances.

In the southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the groups that emerged include, the Afenifere and the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC); the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), the Taliban Nigeria Movement (TNM) and other pro-Sharia (His bah) groups in the North; in the oil-rich south-south, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Ijaw National Congress (INC), Movement for the Survival of the Izon Ethnic Nationality, and the Movement for the Payment of Reparations to the Ogbia, The Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and other resource-based militias. Among the Igbo ethnic extraction, there was a proliferation of different platforms, some of which were social, political and cultural in nature. They include: Mkpoko Igbo, Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), Odenigbo Forum, South East Movement (SEM), Igbo National Assembly (INA), Ndi Igbo Liberation Forum, Igbo Salvation Front (ISF), Igbo Redemption Council (IRC), Igbo Peoples Congress (IPC) and the Igbo Question Movement (IQM). There are also youth groups (but not exclusively made up of youths), such as, the Igbo Youth Council (IYC), Biafra Youth Congress (BYC), Igbo Youth Movement (IYM), the Bakassi Boys, the Federated Council of Igbo Youths (FCIY) and the



Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)<sup>20</sup>, that display a more vibrant form of ethnic nationalism and are more radical in their approach for equity and justice in Nigeria. The proliferation of these platforms is inextricably connected to the resolution of the national question in Nigeria and definitely ties into to the crisis of state legitimacy and citizenship in Nigeria.

## **4.2. MASSOB and the Struggle for Self-Determination**

### ***4.2.1. Origin and Objectives***

The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) was formed on 13 September 1999 in Lagos to advance the interests of the Igbo ethnic group who are mainly concentrated in the South-East and parts of the South-South geopolitical regions of Nigeria. Led by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike an Indian-trained lawyer, MASSOB represents a post-civil war second generation Igbo nationalist movement that contests the marginalization of the Igbo since the end of the civil war and intends to resuscitate Igbo ambitions for self-determination. Apart from these, the formation of MASSOB have been directly linked to Nigeria's militarised democracy, heavy lopsidedness in state-society relations, state complicity in civilian massacres and the failure of successive governments to guarantee Igbo civil rights in Nigeria. In several newspaper interviews in which he articulated the conditions that led to the formation of MASSOB, Uwazuruike has reiterated what he refers to as 'the reality of Igbo

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<sup>20</sup> The existence and activities of these Igbo groups since the late 1990s were gleaned from Nigerian newspapers and author's fieldwork. However, some of these groups have ceased to exist (or are dormant) while others remain active.

marginalisation in Nigeria', alluding to the alleged conspiracy reached between the Hausa and Yoruba against the Igbo after the civil war in 1970 (*The News* 10. 04. 2000).

As Uwazuruike captures it:

*'MASSOB has so many definitions. MASSOB is defined as marginalisation or the result or cause of marginalisation of Ndi Igbo. It is defined as the balance of the 20 Pounds given to Ndi Igbo immediately after the war. It can also be defined as the effect of lack of infrastructure in the Southeast. MASSOB can also be defined as the result of killings of Ndi Igbo in Nigeria....The main issue that led to the formation of MASSOB is the marginalisation, discrimination, elimination, subjugation of Ndi Igbo in Nigeria'*(*Daily Champion* 19. 11. 2007: 41).

He further contends that the condition of the Igbo in Nigeria is unacceptable and calls for the disintegration of the country along ethnic lines, reminiscent of the Soviet experience. As he puts it:

*'What you should understand prima facie is that Nigeria is no good, how Nigeria is being administered is not good. That is why some people are even calling for a sovereign national conference, some people are calling for Biafra and others say self-determination. What I am saying as a person is that I want the Soviet experience to happen in Nigeria. My idea is let Nigeria divide into as many places as possible; let the people go'* (IRIN News 2005).

MASSOB's main objectives include: the actualization of the independent state of Biafra; supporting all entities using peaceful means to bring about Biafra; encouraging sincere and honest dialogue with all nations in Nigeria aimed at peaceful separation of Biafra;

and informing the world about the actualisation of Biafra<sup>21</sup>. Although, the idea of secession is not popular with majority of the Igbo, the pattern of MASSOB's struggle have endeared it to a membership base that include Igbo traders and artisans in different urban centres across the country, and it has won a fanatical following among a new generation of Igbo (youths) born after the civil war. MASSOB claims to be a peaceful movement and has unequivocally stated that the core philosophy in the realisation of its goal is the 'principle of non-violence'. In the words of the leader of the movement, 'Biafra failed because of our violent approach, but this time around we do not want any casualty, yet we are more determined than ever to have our independent Biafra' (Quoted in Akintunde 2000: 39). What can be gleaned from the foregoing is that the objectives of MASSOB are two-fold: the first entails pressuring federal, state and local authorities to convene a referendum in the Southeast in order to ascertain the willingness of the Igbo to secede or remain in the Nigerian project; the second involves the ultimate creation of an independent state of Biafra if the referendum says so. This attests to the movement's desirability of a National Conference as have been requested by other ethnic nationalities, but with a different focus culminating in the creation of an independent state. Uwazuruike echoes this view in this manner (*Tempo* 6. 4. 2000):

*'A Sovereign National Conference where people will come to speak about autonomy, restructuring and true federalism is not what we want. We said that the conference must one that will discuss the dismemberment of the entity called Nigeria, which is a whole gamut of injustice. The name*

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<sup>21</sup> Some of these objectives were raised in the interviews I had with three MASSOB Area Administrators in the MASSOB Office in Lagos, January 2009.

*Nigeria is synonymous with injustice. Nothing good can ever come out of Nigeria. What you hear are power outages, shortage of water, armed robbery and other evils. We don't want to be part of that evil. Nigeria to me is evil'.*

Tacitly expressed, the crux of MASSOB's campaign is geared towards an arrangement that will promote the peaceful and orderly 'disengagement' of the Igbo nation from the Nigerian project into an alternative political and administrative arrangement. MASSOB's 'disengagement' effort from the Nigerian state assumed an important role at its inception with the deployment of ethnicity as a critical referent (Adekson 2004: 91). The movement's concern with the plight of the Igbo ethnic group initially restricted the participation of other ethnic groups in its quest for independence. But in the course of time, it began to seek alliances with ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta.

#### **4.2.2. Membership, Structure and Tactics**

MASSOB has an organizational structure which places the leader of the movement at the apex. It also has its National Representatives, National Co-ordinators, Ambassadors, Secretaries, Regional Administrators, Chief Area Administrators, Area Administrators, Provincial Officers, District Officers and ordinary members of the movement which it estimates to be about 20 million.<sup>22</sup> MASSOB has widespread influence in the former Eastern Region which it refers to as the 30 Regions of Biafra and the leadership of the movement has declared 25 stages in the struggle for the actualization of Biafra with

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<sup>22</sup> Earlier estimates as at January 2002 put the membership of the movement at 6 million, 80 per cent of which are in Nigeria (Adekson 2004: 90). In contrast to the structure presented in this paper, Duruji (2009: 61) presents a four-tier administrative structure in MASSOB: The national level comprising its leadership led by Ralph Uwazuruike; the regional level headed by regional administrators; the provinces headed by provincial administrators; and the districts headed by district heads. There are also commissioners and directors who are responsible for various aspects of governance.

each stage featuring a different strategy as the struggle intensifies.<sup>23</sup> The leader of the movement has reiterated the resolve of MASSOB to embark on the entire 25 stages to realize its goal, if need be. Pressing home this point, Uwazuruike states that:

*'The critics are free to say whatever they like. But the men behind the struggle for Biafra are determined. We are absolutely determined. We are very sure that Biafra will be achieved irrespective of what the critics are saying. For, the critics are not the people who have outlined our programmes. They do not meet with us. We know what they are and we know that there is no way Nigeria can escape it. Whatever you do there must be critics' (Tempo 6. 4. 2000).*

In contrast to the earlier brand of Igbo nationalism that led to the Biafran secession which had substantial consensus among the Igbo ethnic group at home and in the diaspora, the present idea of secession is not popular with older generation of the Igbo. The pattern of MASSOB's struggle has, however, endeared it to a membership base drawn from a community of Igbo traders, artisans, unskilled workers, semi-literates and *Okada*<sup>24</sup> riders in different urban centres across the country, and it has won a fanatical following among a new generation of Igbo youths and young adults, particularly between the ages of 18 and 40 years who were born after the civil war.

MASSOB claims to be a peaceful movement and has unequivocally stated that the core philosophy in the realisation of its goal is the 'principle of non-violence'. In the words of

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<sup>23</sup> These were gleaned from MASSOB publications, newspaper articles, oral interviews and author's fieldwork.

<sup>24</sup> This is a popular form of transportation in many Nigerian cities where passengers are conveyed by motor bikes.

Uwazuruike 'non-violence tactics is yielding dividend for the movement...MASSOB also believes that it is brutish and cowardice to carry arms in a civilised world' (*Daily Champion* 8. 5. 2008: 41). The MASSOB Zonal Offices were saddled with different functions which include: registration of new members; distribution of information regarding the proposed activities of the movement through pamphlets, newsletters and other literature published by the movement; the current state of the struggle and various arrests of members of the movement; and the organisation of weekly/monthly meetings. In terms of funding, MASSOB generates its funds from its registered membership base in Nigeria, and periodic donations from supportive individuals, groups and organisations in the diaspora (Adekson 2004: 91).

MASSOB seeks to differentiate its activities, tactics and strategies from those of the O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and other resource-based ethnic militias in the Niger Delta. While MASSOB perceives these groups as expressly violent, entreating the support of the political elites, it maintains its commitment to peaceful resistance and attributed the pronounced violence orchestrated by the OPC to the tacit support it received from the political elites at the federal and state levels (Adekson 2004: 97). The purported claim of non-violence by movement is inextricably linked to a number of factors, which include, the United Nations repudiation on the adoption of violence by legitimate and independence-seeking entities globally, MASSOB's desire to gain international recognition, and the futility of engaging the state in open confrontations with respect to the experiences from the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War.

#### **4.2.3. Notable Activities of the Movement since Inception**

The key activities of the movement since its inception tends to coincide with the 25 stages it declared in its struggle for self-determination. The first stage which has already been executed relates to the formation of the group itself. The second stage is the declaration of the Biafran state and the mobilization of efforts to support the project. Having set its target at inception, this stage involved the symbolic hoisting of the Biafran flag where the movement officially presented the 'Declaration of the Demand for a Sovereign State of Biafra from the People and Government of Nigeria' in May 2000. The third stage is characterised by the creation of institutions and structures requisite for the functioning of an independent state. Of remarkable importance is the various successful and unsuccessful attempts to hoist the green-red-black Biafran flag in major roads, streets, bill boards and strategic places in the Eastern states of Nigeria, a practice that has become a regular feature in marking the anniversary of the re-declaration of Biafra every May 30. On 22 May 2000, Uwazuruike launched the 'New Biafra' in Aba, a commercial city in south-eastern Nigeria. The occasion marked the unveiling and hoisting of the Biafran flag before a gathering of over 10, 000 Biafran nationalists (*Dawn* 29. 5. 2000; *Vanguard* 23. 5. 2000). In a defiant speech delivered at the ceremony, which has been popularly regarded as the 'Aba Declaration', Uwazuruike asserted that:

*'MASSOB has...packaged about 25 stages for the actualisation of the sovereignty of the new Biafra state through Non-Violence and Non-Exodus. By this process, no single life is expected to be lost in the realisation of our new Biafra state...The process admits of negotiations, dialogue and consultation. It also admits of non-cooperation and passive*

*resistance to oppressive and obnoxious laws of the authorities. Having hoisted the flag of our new Biafra today, we wish to declare our resolve to demand and pursue the realisation of sovereignty from the Federal Government of Nigeria to open up negotiation with MASSOB without any further delay for the realisation of the sovereignty of the new Biafra state. No amount of threat, intimidation or divide and rule tactics can change our resolve...MASSOB shall commence the establishment of necessary structures that may sustain the sovereignty of the new Biafran state, if after 30 days from today the Federal Government of Nigeria fails to initiate the expected negotiations. Perhaps, it might be necessary to state that our desire to be Biafrans is our fundamental human right...More so, there was no time in our history when our various ethnic groups discussed the formation of an entity called Nigeria '(Uwazuruike 2000).*

On 26 August 2004, the movement rallied Nigerians, mostly of Igbo ethnic extraction to observe a sit-at-home order which was widely adhered to. Although, the last order on 28 August 2008 did not achieve much success the movement claims to be in control of the 30 regions of Biafra which comprises the South-east and parts of South-south Nigeria. The limited success of the last sit-at-home order issued by the MASSOB has been attributed to the loss of popularity on the part of the movement and the weakening of its grip on the people's solidarity, but the movement still claims it has widespread popularity and limits the partial compliance to the directive only to state capitals where the seat of government is present (*Sunday Champion 6. 9. 2008: 14.*).

MASSOB has engaged actively in organizing the popular Lagos soccer tournament, known as the 'Uwazuruike Freedom Cup' as a means of pressing home its demands and making symbolic declaration of independence during these events. The movement also



mobilized for the boycott of the National Identity Card Scheme, and the last census exercise (in 2006) in all Igbo states of the southeast on the grounds that these states are not part of Nigeria, but Biafran territory, and therefore, harassing and intimidating those who participated (*Saturday Champion* 7. 7. 2007: 14; *Daily Sun* 1. 12. 2008: 19). In the last elections in 2007, MASSOB mobilised the Igbo of the Southeast, Igbo political aspirants and office-holders through the use of handbills, posters and newspapers to boycott the elections since it perceives the region as a separate entity and not as a part of Nigeria.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4.2.4. Undertaking Parallel Structures of Governance in Igboland**

Over the years, the dynamics of MASSOB's struggle for self-determination has assumed local salience with the emergence and attempted institution of alternative state structures in Eastern Nigeria. However, as a group that challenges the sovereignty of the Nigerian state over Igbo land, MASSOB evokes 'counter-claims of sovereignty', enacts specific 'regimes of security' and seeks to create alternative spaces of 'power and influence' in their Igbo homeland. The movement aims to embark on various forms of civil disobedience in a bid to dismantle every infrastructure that is used to support the Nigerian government in the south-eastern region. These developments negates and challenges the 'absolutist' view of the Nigerian state as the sole founder and main guarantor of law and order, and the main the source of social rules guiding the day-to-day existence of the people in the region. It also calls into question the state-centric

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<sup>25</sup> See the Report on the Election Boycott at: <<http://www.biafra.cwis.org/pdf/REPORT%20ON%20ELECTION.pdf>> (Accessed: 27 February 2009).

approaches to governance and empirically unveils alternative forms of social regulation and governance as a form of resistance against formal state control and sovereignty. It is within the scope of this paper to flag the nature of these developments and how they have played out in the struggle for Igbo self-determination in Nigeria.

In November 2000, MASSOB members began to engage in the vending and enforcement of the official price of petroleum products in filling stations in Igbo states and the forceful seizure of fuel tankers moving from any part of the East to the North as a sign of protest against the non-supply of adequate products to the East (*Guardian* 30. 11. 2000). Right from its onset, MASSOB established the Biafran Security Agency, and as the movement gained popularity in most cities of the southeast, the security outfit began to take on board broader security issues in major cities in the East (especially in Onitsha) and to engage in civic and communal functions like enforcement of rules on residence of states considered to be Igbo states or Biafra territories and pegging of rents where it has become exorbitant. The movement also enforced sanitation laws in urban cities in the East with punitive measures for defaulters and the settlement of disputes between warring groups. Following the decline of the 'Bakassi Boys', a vigilante group of Igbo extraction which mainly operated in the five southeastern states of Nigeria, MASSOB seem to be taking-on broader vigilante and security-related issues in the region. In 2008, a self-imposed responsibility by MASSOB to evict the National Association of Road Transport Workers (NARTO) from motor parks and markets in the city of Onitsha led to the eruption of violence which prompted the governor to issue a shoot-at-sight order leading to the death of several MASSOB activists.

### **4.3. Encounters and Engagements with the State**

Regardless of MASSOB's claim of non-violence, its members have instigated or participated in clashes with state security agents since its emergence in 1999 which has led to the loss of lives. The movement aims to dismantle every infrastructure that is used to support the Nigerian government in the region through various activities, which include: the hoisting of the Biafran flag in the region, the annual celebration of the declaration of Biafra every 30 May, dissemination of illegal currencies for the exchange of goods and services and other activities. Given the nature of its activities, it was inevitable that MASSOB would clash with state security operatives in the course of its mission. Official government position is that the group is irresponsible and illegal. The Special Assistant on Media and Publicity to the former president, Remi Oyo, described the leadership of the movement in this manner:

*'The leader of the MASSOB was somebody engaged in 419 (criminal activities) before now and this (MASSOB) is an extension of 419 activities, and for that reason, the government could not give any serious consideration to such spurious disposition by people of questionable character' (Thisday, 11 August 2000).*

Beginning from March 2000 when the leader of the movement was first detained by State Security Service (SSS) personnel primarily based on his quest for secession from the main federation there have been numerous clashes between the movement and the State Security operatives which have been in the news (*The News* 10. 4. 2000; *Tempo* 6. 4. 2000; *Post Express* 2. 4. 2000). During the same period, the planned hoisting of the Biafran independence flag caused a stir in major cities in other parts of Nigeria where

the Igbo were heavily represented (*PM News* 18. 3. 2002; 11. 4. 2000). In related incidences, security operatives detained the MASSOB leader and 55 other people who were participants of a rally in Lagos (*Post Express* 20. 4. 2000), and subsequently dispersed a gathering in Lagos organised by the Biafran Youth Congress, an affiliate of MASSOB (*The Guardian* 5. 5. 2000). In the early years of MASSOB's activities, official government position on the activities of MASSOB was reflected in the charge of 'breach of peace by an unlawful assembly and a conspiracy to overthrow the president' which was levelled against 65 detained MASSOB members in August 2000 (*Vanguard* 16. 8. 2000). In 2000, court charges were brought against 85 MASSOB members by a Lagos Magistrate Court for organising an unlawful demonstration at the United States Consulate (*Comet News* 29. 8. 2000), and in September 2000, 54 members of MASSOB were tried in court in the south-eastern city of Umuahia (*The News* 21. 9. 2000).

Since its emergence, there have been alleged clashes between MASSOB and state security operatives in its Igbo home-base and headquarters in the south-east. On the 1 December 2000, a detachment of security personnel allegedly invaded Uwazuruike's home town, detained 20 suspected members of MASSOB, and harassed his elderly father and other citizens of his Okigwe home town (*Thisday* 5. 12. 2000). In a related incident, another assault on MASSOB's headquarters in February 2001 led to the death of 10 members of the movement when mobile police officers opened fire on the organisation's one-storey building believed to be housing Uwazuruike and other members of the movement (Uwazuruike 2004: 174). He was allegedly apprehended, tortured and later released (*PM News* 2001; *Vanguard* 16. 2. 2001). In January 2002, the

renewed offensive against the Igbo separatist movement led to the burning down of Uwazuruike's Okigwe residence which has hitherto served as MASSOB's headquarters while he was in detention (*The News* 21. 1. 2002). In a compendium documenting the massacre of its members across the Southeast, it was alleged that 1,044 members of the movement were gunned down in the Okigwe Massacre of March 29, 2003; 498 members in the Owerri and Aba Massacre; 398 in the Enugu and Abakiliki Massacre; and 300 in the Onitsha and Awka Massacre (*This Day* 13. 5. 2008). According to a briefing by the Regional Administrator of the movement, it was claimed that between 22 May 2000 and 22 April 2008, approximately 2,000 registered members of the movement were killed by state security personnel in various cities across the country. The movement also alleged that so many of its members have sustained various degrees of injuries resulting from gunshots and over 1,000 still remains in detention in Nigerian prisons (*The Guardian* 12. 4. 2008). In an occurrence which served to press home the case of marginalisation of the Igbo by the Nigerian state, the leader of the movement and five others were arrested and arraigned by the Federal Government for treasonable charges, and were only granted temporary bail towards the end of 2007. While Uwazuruike was arrested with leaders of other ethnic militias, like Dr. Fredrick Fasehun and Gani Adams (representing the moderate and militant factions of the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) respectively), and Alhaji Asari Dokubo of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the leaders of OPC and NDVF were granted bail shortly afterwards, but Uwazuruike remained in custody until his release in November 2007.

Various clashes between MASSOB and the State Security Service (SSS) have resulted in the clamp down of the movement and its members across the East and other parts of the country. In a statement credited to the Director, State Security Service (SSS) in Ebonyi State (Southeast Nigeria), Mr. Adebayo Adenle, he stated that: 'Nigeria has come to stay, nobody would disintegrate this nation, and Nigeria is one country and will remain so'. With the tacit and open support of some governors in the Southeast there have been several raids on the movement's hideouts across the South-east leading to the discovery of Biafran flags, Biafran military uniforms, belts, umbrellas, currencies, stickers, pictures of Biafran soldiers in military uniforms in training camp, Biafran documents, a sewing machine and an almanac of Biafran hierarchy (see *Daily Champion*, 17. 11. 2008). The monopoly of violence has not been the exclusive preserve of the State Security Service (SSS). On 17 June 2006, it was alleged that MASSOB members burnt three police stations in Onitsha the commercial nerve-centre of the East as a reprisal measure for an earlier attack on their base (*Sunday Champion* 18. 6. 2006: 2). In the following month, members of the movement attacked the Central Police Station in Nnewi (Near Onitsha), burning a fire vehicle, three police operational vehicles within the premises and two adjoining buildings leading to the death of a police sergeant and two members of the movement (*Thisday* 24. 7. 2006: 8).

The series of clashes and confrontations between state security operatives and members of MASSOB have also attracted international attention. The Joint British-Danish Fact Finding Mission 'Report on Human Rights Issues in Nigeria' documents various accounts of intimidation and persecution of MASSOB members and

sympathizers by the Nigerian state and the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The report also alludes to government's relatively 'soft approach' to more violent ethnic militia groups and the 'hard approach' on MASSOB which is perceived to be non-violent (Danish Immigration Service 2005: 11-13). In the section titled, 'Igbo Separatism: MASSOB', the Norwegian Country of Origin Fact Finding Mission attests to the increasing conflict between the separatist group and Nigerian authorities, the persecution of MASSOB members and a number of MASSOB-affiliated claims of asylum cases in Norway and other European countries (Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre 2006: 14-16). The International Crisis Group Report, titled: 'Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment' reports the clash between security forces and MASSOB separatists resulting in the killing of members of the movement who attempted to disrupt the census exercise in the Southeast Nigeria on the grounds that the Igbo are not part of Nigeria (ICG 2006: 16). Another report by the group, titled, 'Nigeria: Failed Elections, Failing State' points to the fallout of the 2007 elections in Nigeria and how the rigging of votes which occurred in the East has fuelled the separatist ambitions championed by MASSOB (ICG 2007: 11). Different reports by the Freedom House (2007), Human Rights Watch (2005), and the BBC (BBC News 2007) documents various clashes between MASSOB on the one hand, and state and federal authorities on the other hand. These reports lend credence to the view that clashes arise from demonstrations and other activities of the movement which threatens the sovereignty and security of the Nigerian state.

#### **4.4. The Elite Complex and Igbo Establishment**

Within the confines of contemporary Igbo nationalism, there seem to be a 'popular' versus 'elite' divide; and a much more obvious generational divide between Igbo youths born after the civil war and young Igbo adults aged 40 years (and below), and the older generation of Igbo comprising many war veterans and much more older adults who witnessed the civil war and who still harbour bitter memories of the agony and pains of the war. The division between the popular/youth group on the one hand, and the elite/older generation of Igbo on the other hand, produces similar internal discourses and divergences over what an 'authentic' Igbo 'ideal' and 'agenda' should be, and a legitimate manner for pursuing it. As such, between Igbo elite groups and MASSOB, there are appeals to 'modern', 'enlightened' and educated 'ideals' and 'ideas' by the former; versus the 'naïve', 'unenlightened' and 'irrational' approach by the latter. The generational dimensions of this divide is also prominent when it comes to who can best represent and defend the Igbo culture and interest in a federation they perceive as structured against the Igbo interest. In a culture that is largely characterised by dispersed authority, absence of any seat of executive authority, and an enduring republican temperament and tendencies from its earliest times, the ascendancy of 'youth power' encapsulated in the activities of MASSOB does not merely interrogate the authority, power and control of a perceived 'cabal' or 'covert group', it feeds into the existing revolutionary tendencies and pressures from below which has come to represent the contemporary phase of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria.



While MASSOB tends to represent a grassroots-based movement which provides a timely philosophical inspiration for disgruntled Igbo youths (mostly traders, artisans and students), it also serves as an alternative to elite-led Igbo groups who tend to be more moderate, less focused and ideological, and who propagate an elitist agenda of ethnic nationalism which the grassroots populations consider to be too woolly, malleable, uninspiring and unattractive to produce any change. A concatenation of events since the end of the civil war demonstrates the failure of Igbo leadership to clearly articulate a common agenda. The 1977 Constituent Assembly that preceded the transition to civil rule in the late 1970s, presented the Igbo with an opportunity to find their way back into the mainstream of politics following their relative disadvantage after the civil war, and it was one of such occasions where the 'Igbo Question' in Nigerian Politics was to be brought to the front burner. To be sure, the conference represented the first of its kind since the end of the civil war and was the first time the different ethnic-nationalities met after the civil war to address the post-military order in Nigeria. Igbo political elites from Imo and Anambra States (South-eastern Nigeria) came to the Constituent Assembly emerged with conflicting visions for the future, irreconcilable interests and the lack of a definition of 'Igbo permanent interests'.

The prevalence of alternative versions or streams of Igbo nationalism is reflected in the activities of elite-led Igbo groups in Igboland. This reading of Igbo political history is aptly captured in the role which the apex pan-Igbo socio-cultural organization, the

*Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*<sup>26</sup> and the Igbo elite in general have played since the end of the civil war. The *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* was formed in 1976 to serve as a unifying apex organization for the Igbo, and to articulate and push the Igbo agenda just like its predecessor (the Igbo State Union) had done during the colonial period. This assumption failed to materialize due to the fact that *Ohanaeze* was hijacked by Igbo political elites who sought to align with the ruling party and submit to a subordinate role in the prevailing power configuration. For strategic reasons, the leadership of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* became inclined to the ruling Shehu Shagari-led National Party of Nigeria (NPN) at the centre and was largely recognised as the 'Igbo wing' of the NPN under a different name. As it seemed then, the leadership of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* saw the emergence of Dr. Alex Ekwueme (a fellow Igbo) as vice president under the Hausa-Fulani-led Shagari government, not only as a solution to the lack of leadership in Igboland, but as a means of re-connecting to mainstream politics at the national level . As such, there was a rallying of Igbo positions behind Dr. Ekwueme, and *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* became strongly opposed to the Azikiwe-led Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), arguing that Azikiwe and other Igbo in NPP should accord recognition to Dr. Ekwueme as the highest elected official from Igboland. Predictably, the NPP dismissed Dr. Ekwueme, the NPN and *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* and its leaders as stooges of the North. On another front, the political tendencies in Igboland became more complicated with the arrival from exile of Dim Emeka Ojukwu, the ex-Biafran leader. Unwilling to accept the pre-eminent leadership of Azikiwe in Igboland, the new leadership of Ekwueme in NPN and the political agenda of *Ohanaeze*

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<sup>26</sup> *Ohanaeze* means 'the people and the leaders- the entire community or nation.

*Ndi Igbo*, Ojukwu was still intent on asserting his political leadership in Igboland. In a bid to re-enact his leadership this time through the ballot box, Ojukwu launched the 'Ikemba Front' in 1983 as a partisan political organisation, and tried to use his place in Igbo history to garner votes from his people and seek election into the Senate from where he could challenge the new leadership of Ekwueme. The project met its Waterloo when his Senatorial District in Nnewi, Anambra State, rejected him in 1983.

Another prominent Igbo group, *Aka Ikenga*<sup>27</sup>, an Igbo think-tank which has been popularly referred to as the 'intellectual wing' of *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* also disagrees with MASSOB on the best strategies for pursuing a collective Igbo Agenda. Comprising of young thriving Igbo professionals from several works of life, *Aka Ikenga* was formed in 1988 in the throes of the crisis of adjustment and military dictatorship in Nigeria. Its main purpose was to act as a pressure group to agitate for the inclusion of the Igbo in the mainstream of politics and to carve out its own share of the national patrimony. In recent times, the group has called on the Igbo to move away from regurgitating the memories of the civil war and Igbo marginalization in Nigeria, but to chart a new course for the future. Through the organization of periodic lectures, seminars and conferences, the group uses its contacts to influence decisions and engage the present crop of Igbo political leadership at the national, state and local levels to make a difference in their offices. Pressing home the need for a different strategy, the vice-president of the group, Chief Goddy Uwazurike, maintained that: 'Ojukwu (the former Biafran secessionist leader) fought at 34, he will not fight at 54. Now in his 70s, he merely advises', adding

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<sup>27</sup> Aka Ikenga is an Igbo think-tank comprising of young Igbo professionals from all works of life.

that 'the message of MASSOB has gained a prominent following among Igbo youths who did not experience the civil war' (*interview 15. 1. 2009*).

At the inception of the movement in 1999, many prominent Igbo politicians, legislators, governors from the Southeast states, and the apex Igbo organization *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* were quick to distance themselves from the movement and reminded Uwazuruike that the dream of Biafra died in 1970 (Akinyele 2001: 633). Prominent elite Igbo groups like *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* and *Aka Ikenga* both agree on the need to address the 'Igbo Question' and the place of the Igbo in the post-civil war Nigerian project, but their opposition to MASSOB is predicated largely on disagreements on the best strategies for pursuing a collective Igbo agenda. The uneasy relation between MASSOB and the *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* is captured in the words of the former Secretary-General of the organisation, who made the following remarks about MASSOB:

*'For me as an Ohanaeze chieftain, it (MASSOB) does not convey the type of meaning that should give me joy, for the following reasons: as elders, we believe that since we quit the battle field, all our efforts should now be geared towards winning peace, freedom and total integration for our people. That the youths, because of the severe hardship unleashed in the polity, now feel that they would rather pursue a separatist alternative should not give us joy, because we know the consequences of such a division. Hence, Ohanaeze is still fighting to make sure that there is no more marginalisation' (Ejinkeonye 2005).*

What the *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* chieftain referred to as a 'separatist alternative' pursued by MASSOB underscores the conflicting views on how to articulate the collective

struggles of the Igbo in the Nigerian public sphere. While the *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* is basically moderate and conservative, or even complicit in subverting the Igbo agenda, MASSOB has assumed a radical and critical stance, by rejecting the leadership of the organisation and describing them as a group of 'elderly cowards' who have aided the marginalisation of the Igbo (Akinyele 2001: 634).

It is pertinent to state that since the end of the civil war, the 'Igbo Presidency Project' has been central to the resolution of the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria. While issues like citizenship rights, devolution of power, true federalism and equal access to power all find expression under the 'Igbo Question', the 'Igbo Presidency Project' seem to have become a cardinal negotiating point in the Igbo quest for reinventing Nigeria. This assumption forms the basis of the 'tripod theory' which holds that stability can only be achieved in the Nigerian federation when there is a balance between the three major ethnic groups. But the inability of the *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* and the entire Igbo leadership to throw up a formidable presidential candidate during the 1989-1993 Babangida transition programme underscores the disarray in Igboland. Instead, some prominent Igbo leaders pursued an anti-Yoruba agenda making themselves instruments of the June 12 annulment, and helped in sustaining the annulment under the Abacha regime. This underscores Ake's (2000: 107) point that within the political class, the annulment of the election was not as unpopular as it seemed and that was why the struggle to reverse the decision and validate the results of the election dissipated gradually.

In the 2003 presidential elections there were several political tendencies in Igboland which were played out in different political parties at the time. Once again, the *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* failed to articulate a coherent 'Igbo Presidency Project' when it could not advise Igbo political leaders whether to pursue their ambition within the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) or through another party. In the confusion that ensued, there was the emergence of over ten presidential candidates of Igbo ethnic extraction, with the prominent ones being Dim Emeka Ojukwu of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Ike Nwachukwu of the National Democratic Party (NDP), and Jim Nwobodo of the United National Independence Party (UNIP). The only realistic chance for an Igbo presidency remained with Dr. Ekwueme whose late entry into the race ended with his defeat at the PDP National Convention. Hence, the 'Igbo Presidency Project' was buried partly due to the failure of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* to get the entire Southeast to agree to the idea of a single Igbo candidate for the 2003 elections. Ironically, *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* was also complicit in sabotaging its own self-proclaimed objective of electing an Igbo president in 2003. Another contributory factor to the collapse of the project had to do with the role of the Southeast governors who rather than fighting for a common cause and the realising the Igbo presidency dream did the opposite, by immersing themselves in their selfish ambition of securing a second term which created divisions within the ranks of Igbo leadership.

The contradiction between *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* position and the realisation of the Igbo presidency was further deepened at the inconclusive constitutional conference organised by the Obasanjo administration in 2006. Although, the conference was largely

a response to the demand for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) by different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, the Obasanjo administration fashioned out a heavily diluted version of the conference and attempted to use the review to ensure an amendment of the 1999 Constitution that would grant him a third term in office. The third term project finally collapsed at the National Assembly in May 2006. But the role of the leadership of the *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* in this despicable project further discredited the entire organisation and its leadership. At the Abakaliki Zonal hearing of the Constitutional Review Committee, the then president of the organisation, Professor Joe Irukwu, stated that the *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* would endorse a third term tenure for the president and other political offices. This was considered a tacit approval of the president's third term agenda and a sell-out by the *Ohanaeze* leadership on the 'Igbo Presidency Project' for 2007.

Apart from *Ohanaeze's* paradoxical role in contemporary Igbo politics, the organisation is also immersed in a protracted leadership crisis which had effectively robbed it of its status in Igboland. The immediate issue had to do with the tenure of office of the elected executives, which according to the *Ohanaeze* constitution is supposed to last for two years. The Professor Irukwu-led executive assumed office in 2004 was supposed to hand over the affairs of the organisation to a new executive by February 2006. But while in office, Irukwu had cited the existence of a new *Ohanaeze* Constitution which allegedly guarantees a four-year term for the executives, a position that was intensely contested by other interested parties. The expiration of the tenure of the Irukwu-led executive in 2006 set the stage for a prolonged leadership crisis. The governors of the five South-

eastern states waded into the crisis by appointing a Care-Taker Committee led by Ndubuisi Kanu to conduct elections and hand-over to a new executive. Elections were conducted with the approval of the governors and Chief Dozie Ikedife emerged as the President-General of the organisation, while the Irukwu/Achuzia-led executive continued to carry on as the leaders of the organisation. Having lost face among the Igbo due to the third term debacle which he tacitly supported, Irukwu became increasingly unpopular among the Igbo and resigned his position as President-General. He handed over to his deputy, Chief Ifeanyi Enechukwu, who is also contemplating spending four years in office as President-General of the organisation. As it stands, both the Ikedife and Enechukwu factions are in court, and both factions still claim to represent the *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo*. Presently, the organisation seems to be mending fences with the emergence of a new leadership structure under Chief Ralph Uwechue.<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, the Igbo-dominated All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) which controls the south-eastern state of Anambra has been locked in a protracted leadership tussle for the control of the party's structure since 2005.

A closer scrutiny of contemporary Igbo-elite politics reveals a maze of alliances, treachery and failure of leadership at different levels. With respect to the role of the governors and the *Ohanaeze*, there seem to be an attempt to hijack the organisation for their own political ends. This stems from the politicisation of the current leadership crisis in the organisation and the stance of the governors which appears to be an

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<sup>28</sup> For a different version of the role of *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* in the abortive Third Term saga, see Irukwu (2007: 211-220).



imposition on the organisation. For the Igbo elites within the ruling PDP there seems to be no genuine effort to represent the Igbo in their zero-sum quest for power. This was further exposed by the intrigues and horse-trading that characterised the party's National Convention where the chairman of the party was to be elected in 2008. The various tendencies at play during the elections revealed the clientele disposition of Igbo elites within the ruling party, and how these elites are used to the service of outside interests and abandonment of the Igbo cause. Therefore, what emerges is the existence of a political class whose members never stand for anything that is in the interest of the Igbo. Closely related to the above is the proliferation of socio-cultural platforms in Igboland, most of which are elitist in their disposition and aspire to fill a leadership vacuum in Igboland.

While these different tendencies are played out in contemporary Igbo politics, the ambiguities and paradoxes within this divergent split is brought into bold relief by MASSOB's intolerance to opposing views. Shortly after its inception, the separatist movement vowed to 'deal ruthlessly with public office-holders of Igbo ethnic extraction who work against the interest of the Igbo community' (*PM News* 14. 5. 2001). Prior to the 2003 elections in Nigeria, the movement threatened to sanction and 'strip naked' prominent Igbo citizens who were opposed to the emergence of an Igbo president in 2003, or those embarking on 'anti-Igbo activities'. It, however, warned that the movement would disrupt the 2003 elections in the Southeast if the position of the president was not zoned to the region (See *This Day* 22. 3. 2002; *This Day* 8. 5. 2002; *This Day* 23. 5. 2002; *Tempo* 4. 4. 2002; *Guardian* 22. 5. 2002; *Vanguard* 29. 5. 2002).

Possibilities for constructive engagement between these opposing views sometimes collapse totally and have led to open threats of attack on prominent Igbo elites by MASSOB members and an attempt to disrupt the last Igbo Day Celebrations in 2008 (*The Nation*, 30. 9. 2008; *Daily Champion*, 12. 8. 2008; *Guardian* 8. 12. 2008; *Daily Punch* 22. 9. 2008).

While the 'popular' versus 'elite' divide thesis in Igbo nationalism exists, this thesis needs qualification in view of the fact that the relationship between MASSOB on the one hand; and mainstream Igbo nationalist organizations and official power holders at the federal and state levels on the other hand is not exclusively one of antagonism and conflict. The erstwhile Biafran leader, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, remains a prominent member of the Igbo elite who still supports the neo-Biafran cause, but subscribes to the 'Biafra of the soul and of the mind'. Apart from his presence at the opening of the Biafra House in Washington, D.C, he claims that Biafra represents an opinion which should be allowed to flourish in democratic society and sees Uwazuruike as being more courageous than many who claim to be Igbo leaders (*Tell Magazine* 15. 1. 2001: 28; *Iheanacho* 2004). Despite their differences with MASSOB, *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo, Aka Ikenga*, and the entire Igbo political class (comprising governors, senators and members of the House of Representatives from the Southeast) have sometimes demonstrated the capacity to safeguard 'Igbo interests' when they unanimously requested for the nullification of charges against MASSOB members which they attribute to 'youthful exuberance' (*Post Express* 28. 8. 2000). They also called for Uwazuruike's release while he was in detention with leaders of other ethnic militias who were released ahead of

him. But within this class, the call for Uwazuruike's release was not as popular as it seemed, compared to the strong agitation for his release expressed by most Igbo youths. This partly explains why the decision to release him took so long (*Sunday Champion* 7. 7. 2007: 14). Presently, MASSOB and *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* appear to be mending fences. This was marked by Uwazuruike's visit to the *Ohanaeze* leader who used the opportunity to call for an end to the harassment of MASSOB members by state security operatives (*Daily Champion* 19. 3. 2009).

From its inception, the movement declared categorically that it was not interested in politics, except a calculated desire to actualize their dream of a sovereign state of Biafra. Consequently, it has not launched a political party or maintained any affiliation with existing parties owing to the organisation's focus on secession from Nigeria and its lack of interest in Nigeria's political system which it considers to be a 'dirty game'. As such, while MASSOB's relations with most governors in the south-east remains strained. But the case of Anambra State appears to be different. MASSOB supported the emergence of Peter Obi, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) candidate for governor, after the Elections Petitions Tribunal ruled in his favour against the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, Chris Ngige, in the rigged 2003 elections in the state. Relations between MASSOB and Governor Peter Obi soon deteriorated following a self-imposed responsibility by the former to evict the National Association of Road Transport Workers (NARTO) from motor parks and markets in the city of Onitsha, the violence which erupted prompted the governor to issue a shoot-at-sight order which resulted in the death of several MASSOB activists. Uwazuruike attributes MASSOB's support for

Governor Peter Obi to Odumegwu Ojukwu who mobilized the movement to support him. In an uncanny show of interest, the movement recently indicated its interest to participate in politics in Anambra State, South-east Nigeria, vowing to support whoever gets the endorsement of Odumegwu Ojukwu, the ex-Biafran leader.

#### **4.5. Contradictions, Structural Limitations and the Fractionalisation of MASSOB**

From the inception of MASSOB in 1999 till 2007, there seemed to be no factions within the movement; rather there appeared to be an agreement regarding its leadership, objectives, tactics and relationship with the state. However, with the incarceration of Uwazuruike by the Obasanjo administration in 2005, MASSOB began to experience a leadership tussle precipitated largely by disagreements on who to lead the movement and the best strategy to adopt going forward. By the time Uwazuruike was released in October 2007, the rift within the movement had deepened and it did not take long before this rift spawned the proliferation of breakaway factions. At least three factions have emerged from MASSOB in recent times, and they all articulate the conditions which produced their emergence in a justificatory manner. One of the splinter groups led by Mr. Sylva Ilozuruike attributed the resignation of between 15,000 to 20,000 members from the movement to the corrupt practices of the MASSOB leader, the failure to give a befitting burial to all slain members of the movement, and his subsequent abandonment of the cause of the group (*Daily Champion* 13. 2. 2008: 1; *Daily Champion* 6. 2. 2008: 1; *Daily Independent* 6. 2. 2008; *The Sun* 26. 9. 2008). Another faction, known as *MASSOB International*, led by Captain Igonma Aghalaigbo has also dissociated itself from the movement. The group accused the leader of MASSOB of

corruption, self-centeredness, covetousness and lack of focus, which were all against the spirit of the movement (*Daily Champion* 8. 5. 2008: 6; *Daily Champion* 12. 5. 2008: 1; *Vanguard* 12. 5. 2008). A third group, known as the *Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups* (COBLIG) emerged towards the end of 2008, under the leadership of Prince Longinus Orjiakor. The group which claims to be an umbrella body comprising seven Igbo liberation groups in Nigeria and two in Diaspora, include: Eastern People's Congress (EPC); Movement for Igbo Defense (MID); Eastern Mandate Union (EMU); Popular Front for the Development of Igbo Land (PFDIL); Biafran Liberation Group (BLG); Ohazurume Ndi Igbo (ONI); Eastern Solidarity Forum (ESF); Biafran Human Right (BHR) in Germany; and Ekwe Nche Indi Igbo (ENI) in the United States. In a recent development, another group, known as the Biafran Liberation Council (BLC), emerged in February 2009. This group claims to comprise all pro-Biafran groups in COBLIG in the Igbo mainland and the Great Commonwealth of the Niger Delta (GCND) in the Niger Delta.

Reacting to these developments, Uwazuruike claims that the emergence of these factions is driven by greed, materialism and ambition (*Daily Champion*, 13 February 2008). It is against this background that the factionalism and waning enthusiasm which has characterized the movement in recent times can be understood. These breakaway factions accuse Uwazuruike of fundamental errors of leadership, and lack of clarity, structure and focus which has made the movement to revolve around him alone. There are strong insinuations that there is a leadership vacuum in Igboland which the MASSOB leader seems to be contesting for, and that the re-alignments and emergence of breakaway factions are externally-induced to weaken movement. All these calls into

question the viability of the MASSOB project as an alternative to other elite-led Igbo groups, and critically interrogates its emancipatory potentials.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The themes and issues covered in this chapter relate to the different variants, streams and versions of contemporary Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. Although, there are widespread perceptions on the reality of Igbo marginalisation in Nigeria, there seem to be the absence of a coherent agenda among the Igbo to articulate these grievances. The advent of MASSOB, as it appears unleashed different tendencies, both revolutionary and reactionary, pushing for different agenda in the quest to address the 'Igbo Question' in contemporary Nigeria. More so, the 'Igbo Question' goes beyond the present, but draws on a history and memory of 'collective Igbo suffering or deprivation'. The debate also transcends the local context, and incorporates issues and insights from the Igbo Diaspora. The next chapters will engage these developments in greater detail, and explore its links with other debates and issues which have been explored in this and previous chapters in detail.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Memory Politics and the 'Re-making' of Igbo Identity

*'The Igbo suffers in present day Nigeria because they fought a war and were defeated ... if the issue of addressing past wrongs and injustice is not dealt with, the memory of the defeat in the civil war will remain with most Igbo'* – (Private communication with Morris Ogwu, Area Administrator of MASSOB, Lagos, 15 December, 2009).

#### 5.0. Introduction

Memories of persecution, deprivation and marginalisation have become part of the dominant Igbo narrative since the end of the civil war, and have recently served as an inspiration for Igbo agitation in Nigeria. Specifically, this chapter examines the manner in which the Nigerian nation-state has been contested in recent times by the Igbo, and how they adopt a deviant narrative and historical representation to sustain Igbo memories since the end of the civil war. By focusing on recent reconstructions of Igbo 'memory', the chapter explores the use of a collection of 'memory repertoires' by MASSOB and other neo-Biafran movements to reconstruct historical memory, national identity, and to seek the self-determination of the Igbo and exit from the Nigerian state. The core issue in this context relates to the dual narratives generated by the Nigerian-Biafran War. While the Nigerian state is intent on shaping the history and memories of the war to suit its own vision, interests and politics, the Igbo still connects to the war as a war of Igbo national liberation. The claims and counter-claims enacted by these contestations provide the setting in which 'memory' is being played out overtime in a political context, and its association with political violence in contemporary Nigeria.

MASSOB is a movement largely composed of Igbo youths below the age of forty, most of whom were born after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 and young Igbo adults who are above forty or middle aged. Most of them did not experience the war, those born shortly before the war or during the war were either too young, or were incapable of accurately recollecting the events of that period, but their attitude towards the effects of the war has been directly influenced by memories of the war. Owing to certain experiences which they have been subjected to in present day Nigeria, these Igbo youths have made a connection between the present and the past, a past which most of them were not necessarily a part of, but are bound to through 'collective memory'. They make this connection through the recollection of memories of the war, which they do not actually remember since they were not there, but which they recall by belonging to a community.<sup>29</sup> Like most ethno-nationalist movements, MASSOB draws from a collective sense of Igbo heroics and achievements in the past, and the present experience of deprivation, marginalisation and injustice against the Igbo within the context of the Nigerian nation-state. There is a sense of a collective Igbo 'memory' adopted in the struggle which draws on a past that is not only commonly shared, but also jointly remembered. This becomes more vivid when the extant environment still bears heavily on 'what' is remembered and 'how' it is remembered (Zerubavel 1996; Okoye 2007).

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<sup>29</sup> I interviewed a cross-section of MASSOB members, and other Igbo people not affiliated to MASSOB, both formally and informally, who express a relationship between the present Igbo situation in Nigeria and the defeat of Biafra which brought an end to the civil war in 1970.



The process of constructing or reconstructing memories to create or recreate an identity is empowering, and has been studied as 'memory work' (Litzinger 1998; Irwin-Zarecka 1989). Memory studies have been generally associated with an aggregation of practices like commemoration, memorials and general forms like tradition, myth or identity, and offers opportunity for multi-disciplinary insights from history, sociology, literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, art history, political science and philosophy, among other disciplines (Olick and Robbins 1998: 106). Memory studies offer an opportunity for a non-paradigmatic, trans-disciplinary and centreless undertaking by virtue of its potential to enable scholars move beyond 'narrow disciplinary boundaries' and share insights that are relatively inaccessible to those outside each discipline (Climo and Cattell 2002: 2). This tendency has engendered the possibility of attaching a host of adjectival appellations to the term, which Olick and Robbin (1998), Halbwachs (1992) and Climo and Cattell (2002) have variously captured as: collective memory, cultural memory, historical memory, local memory, official memory, public memory, popular memory, social memory, autobiographical memory, shared memory, custom, myth, heritage, roots and tradition. This means that memory may be provisional, negotiated and contested, forgotten, suppressed or recovered, invented, revised or reinvented (Climo and Cattell 2002: 2). For the purpose of this study, an inquiry into memory studies is intended to examine the diverse means through which the present is shaped by the past on the one hand; and how the past and the present are intertwined and deployed in a political context. In contemporary times, 'memory politics' or the 'politics of memory' is deeply implicated in a host of contested issues related to culture, truth,

history, identity struggles and nation-building. In this chapter, the notion of 'memory politics' is examined, with a view to understanding how MASSOB is deploying 'memory repertoires' in the reinvention of Igbo identity and struggle for self-determination in Nigeria.

### **5.1. Memory, Identity and Nation-Making**

The drift towards memory studies in Africa is intertwined with the contemporary memory crisis on the continent, which Werbner (1998) locates in post-colonial situations where colonial nostalgia, state memorialisation and popular counter-memory (which differs from official memory of the state) all combine to constitute centrifugal forces in post-colonial democratic, repressive or authoritarian states. After the great wave of independence in the 1960s, emergent independent African nations strove to produce and legitimise particular national narratives as a means of fostering social cohesion and national unity. In the years following independence, nationalist leaders in most African states were committed to decolonising colonial culture and giving content to a new national culture. As part of a larger post-colonial project of nation-building and the need to bolster national identity and citizenship, significant financial resources and ideological labour was invested in state-sponsored cultural institutions, museums, memorials and the overhaul of national curriculum. The role of state-sponsored cultural institutions in the process of giving content to an official national culture is aptly captured in Anderson's (1991: 5-7) definition of the nation, as a specific form of cultural artefact forging together groups of unrelated people who imagine themselves into a coherent community. The creation of an official culture 'promotes a nationalistic,

patriotic culture of the whole that mediates an assortment of vernacular interests' (Bodner 1992: 13-14). Intrinsically, in most post-colonial Africa states, the erection of a 'nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole' employed colonialism as the counterpoint and backdrop against which the politics of national cultural recovery and rebirth occurred (Arnoldi 2006: 55-56).

Several challenges confronted the state in Africa and severely undercut its bid to promote national unity in the first two decades after independence. Some of these challenges include: the dynamics, antecedents and contradictions of the development process on the continent, and the failure of democracy which is perceived to be a facilitator of development to produce positive outcomes and deliver on the post-independence social contract. These challenges brought national issues related to the unresolved crisis of state ownership, citizenship and power-sharing to the fore. In Nigeria, like in many post-colonial African states, post-independence stability was severely threatened by inter-ethnic rivalries among its constituent ethnic groups. Immediately after independence, the inter-ethnic power struggle was given a much broader appeal when it assumed a zero-sum contest and ushered in a host of other crisis the emergency rule in the Western Region in 1962; the census crisis of 1962/1963; the election crisis of 1964/1965; the intervention of the military in January 1966; a counter-coup six months later, which culminated in the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War (1967-1970).

These developments presented enormous challenges to Nigeria's nation-building project at two levels. First, at the sectional level, the ethnic sentiments and chauvinism that characterised this period were marked by the massacre of the Igbo, the loss of their properties and means of livelihood in different parts of the country. Second, on a national scale, the ultimate limitation to Nigeria's nation-building project was expressed on 30 May 1967, when secession became an overt act in Nigeria with the disengagement of the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region from the main federation into an alternative political and administrative arrangement, known as, the 'Republic of Biafra'. In July 1967, the Federal Military Government (FMG) maintained that Biafra remains part of Nigeria and Biafran secession was backed by military force leading to its eventual collapse in January 1970. Four decades after, the dominant discourse is that the Igbo nation are yet to be re-integrated into the Nigerian project, and this debate has attracted extensive discussions in academic literature (Ikpeze 2000; Ojukwu 2009; Duruji 2009).

This chapter proceeds from the basic premise that social memory as representations of the past of a particular group of people is relevant, both for the present and the future, in constructing or reconstructing, claiming or rejecting group identities, in making claims to land and other resources, and in various other issues (Climo and Cattell 2002: 33). Olick and Robbins (1998: 123) point out that the crucial link between literatures on identity and memory relates to how we derive our personal and social identities. They further argue that 'national and other identities are established and maintained through a variety of mnemonic sites, practices and forms' (1998: 124). Identity-making may not

be achieved or completed, rather it is in constant flux, and constitutes an ongoing process of construction of self and other, and of social groups (Climo and Cattell 2002: 33). The study of memory clearly shows that memory is neither an unchanging carrier of the past into the present, nor a thing, but a process that works differently in different contexts (Zelizer 1995). This brings central issues related to power, identity, hegemonic struggles and contestations to the fore.

Different narratives in identity theory have seen identities as a product of ongoing processes of construction in narrative form (Bruner 1990; Calhoun 1994). As MacIntyre argues (1984: 218), 'attempts to elucidate the notion of personal identity (and, by extension, group identity) independently of, and in isolation from the nations of narrative are bound to fail'. Hence, 'identities (personal and collective) are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past' (Huyssen 1995: 1). Identities, are therefore, understood not as properties, but as projects and practices (Olick and Robbins 1998: 122). Hobsbawm (1972) concludes that 'to be a member of any human community is to situate oneself with regard to one's past, if only by rejecting it'. The often cited expression credited to Bellah et al (1995: 153), maintains that 'communities ... have a history (in an important sense are constituted by their past) and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a 'community of memory', one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative'.

In exploring the link between the literature on 'memory' and 'identity', Olick and Robbins (1998: 123) argue that the vital aspect to be examined relates to how we acquire our personal and social identities. Halbwachs (1992) notes the role of family in influencing how we construct the past, while Zerubavel (1996) makes a connection on the relationship between 'mnemonic socialisation' and 'mnemonic communities'. This relationship proceeds from a premise which holds that we remember not as individuals, but as members of local and national communities. For Zerubavel (1996: 286) 'all subsequent interpretations of our early "recollections" are only interpretations of the way they were originally experienced and remembered within the context of our family'. Zerubavel adds that 'what we "remember" includes more than just what we have personally experienced' and 'much of what we remember we did not experience personally' (1996: 289). In the same vein, 'being social presupposes the ability to experience events that happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past...'. This process 'accounts for the sense of pride, pain, or shame we sometimes experience with regard to events that had happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them' (1996: 290).

The foregoing reveals the dynamic character of memory and identity formation. As Archibald (2002) argues, this involves a process of continuously reinventing ourselves and modifying stories about ourselves to achieve consistency. Fleshing out the above argument, Schwartz (1996: 278) points out that "mnemonic communities" maintain "mnemonic traditions", teach new generations what to remember and forget through

“mnemonic socialisation”, the monitoring of “mnemonic others”, and the fighting of “mnemonic battles”. Thus, remembering comes into view as a control system’. This raises several issues, ranging from: ‘who to remember’; ‘how to remember’; ‘who owns the story, narrative, history, memories, voice(s)’; ‘which voice(s) should be privileged or ignored’; ‘can one group or person speak for another’. The other issues relate to the interest structures at play and why memory (collective and individual) is important.

## **5.2. Locating ‘Igbo Memory’ in Post-Civil War Nigeria**

There are various perspectives on the ‘Nigerian Civil War’ or ‘Nigerian-Biafran War’. These perspectives have become important owing to their salience to the continued existence of the Nigerian nation-state project. With respect to the memories of the war, the impact of the defeat of the Igbo was to be cushioned by the ‘no winner, no vanquished’ mantra of the Federal Military Government (FMG) in power, and the FMG decision to implement the institutional agenda of the ‘Three R’s: Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction’ which largely shaped the post-civil war Nigerian public space. As Last (2000: 315) notes, that the policy was aimed at minimising the public memorializing of the conflict and to restore a semblance of the status quo. Given the manner in which the Biafran secession was suppressed militarily, the decision by the FMG to adopt a policy of reconciliation was magnanimous. The war probably turned out to be the only armed conflict of its magnitude in history, perpetrated with so much viciousness and bitterness, where no reprisals, trials or executions occurred.

For some sections of the Nigerian population, the policy of 'Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction' by the FMG was perceived as an act of magnanimity, particularly to a people (the Igbo) who took on the entire Nigerian state in a bitter war of secession. For others, the perception was that the Igbo had suffered enough given the massacre of the Igbo that preceded the war and the fact that they eventually lost the war itself. Since the general attitude towards the war was 'to let sleeping dogs lie', most of these views were expressed privately and there was a near silence on the issue in the public space. Last (2000: 316) argues that 'reconciliation at the popular level was initially not so much about cancelling hurts as about not allowing those hurts to stand in the way of everyday life'. Consequently, the post-civil war Nigerian public space came across as one in which people harboured the memory of hurt and injury, but did not express them, and these memories were gradually eased out of the public space and increasingly became a property of private memory. To be sure, in the emergent post war phase, reconciliation was targeted at undermining group peculiarities and differences, and shoring up inter-ethnic cohesion. Pronouncements by the FMG which guaranteed the personal safety and security of the Igbo and their properties; the right to reside and work anywhere in Nigeria; the re-absorption of public civil servants of Igbo extraction into the civil service and the military; and the granting of general amnesty to the Igbo all served to reinforce these tendencies.

Conceived in this manner, 'reconciliation' constituted a veritable new grand narrative that superseded other narratives in the post-civil war Nigerian public space. It was reinforced by certain developments which gave the impression that Nigeria emerged



from the war as a stronger and more united state. First, the post-war years coincided with the advent of Nigeria's 'oil boom'. These gave the FMG the leverage to position effectively and play a prominent role in the redistributive imperatives which characterised its mono-product economy. It also provided the incentives that strengthened different regional elites to play to the centre. Second, although, the abolition of the existing four regions in June 1967 (North, East, West and Mid-West) and its replacement with twelve states was a tactical move calculated to undermine Biafra's claims to oil in the Niger Delta, in the post-war setting these states served to undermine the regional platforms that had dogged Nigeria's federal experiment in the first decade of independence. Third, in the aftermath of the civil war, the Nigerian state became more dominant and hegemonic. It did not only exert its authority domestically, it was also able to project power in its foreign policy by hosting the Second All African Games in 1973 and the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977. Hence, the process of reconciliation occurred largely within the context of economic prosperity occasioned by the oil boom, relative security, grudging conviviality and a sense of Nigeria being the 'Great Hope of the Black Race', both to Africans at home and those in the diaspora.

This meant that internally the pursuit of 'sectional', 'regional' or 'ethnic' justice had to be abandoned in the interest of nation building. Publicly, there were no statements on who has suffered, what has been suffered or who to punish or compensate. For both victims and perpetrators, there were no apologies or reparations, and no one was held accountable for any wrong doing. For most part, the policy of reconciliation turned out

to be unpopular at the grassroots level. Despite the FMG-instituted Abandoned Properties Implementation Committee (APIC), most Igbo abandoned properties were never returned even in parts of the former Eastern Region (Port-Harcourt). The absence of a public space to address the 'injustices' associated with the war led the emergence of widely incompatible representations of the war and its causes. While the FMG saw the war and Biafran secession as Igbo ethnic rebellion, the Igbo perceived the war as foisted on them by prior events, and broadly connected to the war as one for the survival of the Igbo nation. The FMG's policy of reconciliation focused on the Biafran secessionist attempt and the civil war that followed, but for the Igbo the main issues had to do with the massacres of the Igbo in Northern cities since the Jos riots of 1945 and the quest for Igbo-Nigerian citizenship which triggered the secessionist attempts in the first instance.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the FMG's policy of reconciliation would have produced a different outcome if these fundamental differences and views had been brought to the fore. But given the context and what the government sought to achieve, partial reconciliation was the only possible outcome and it seemed satisfactory at the time. The manner of reconciliation allowed group memories of 'injustice' and 'hurt' to flourish in the private realm which comprised the private domain of kinship, town unions and family networks. This came at a cost, and in the words of Last (2000: 317) 'in keeping it (reconciliation) out of the public domain, the sense of ambivalence was left unresolved, the scale of anger and resentment still felt could not be assessed nor its location identified'. These ties into the fact that the implementation of the FMG's

pronouncement of general amnesty failed to square up with the reality when one considers the 'Twenty Pound Scandal', the timing for the implementation of the Indigenisation Decree and the fact that most Igbo officers who fought the war on the Biafran side were not re-admitted into the Nigerian army and were retired without benefits. Given the prevailing scenario, the Igbo linked the process of post-war memory and recovery to certain institutional and structural policies by the FMG that perpetuated Igbo marginalisation, and which bears semblance to an 'unofficial policy' by the federal government to punish the Igbo for their secessionist attempt in order to forestall a future recurrence from any section of the country.

### **5.3. Contestations and Competing Narratives on the Nigerian Civil War**

It is impossible to dispute the remarkable pace of post-war recovery in Nigeria. This was obviously due to the commitment of the FMG towards non-violence after the war, a policy which stunned Western observers, policy makers and scholars alike. In one of the best researched accounts of the war, John de St. Jorre echoed the surprise that 'there was no genocide, massacres or gratuitous killings', pointing out that 'in the history of warfare, there can rarely have been such a bloodless end and such a merciful aftermath' (cited in Stremlau 1977:366). Contrary to these views, the main issues were not over the post-war recovery, but on the extent of the recovery and whether the recovery should not have been greater. Much later, when open debates about the war began to resurface in the public space, the issue of 'memory' became highly contested and diverse, particularly when it is evoked in the struggle over identity, political power and legitimacy.

Presently, the Nigerian public space depicts a scenario where memories of the civil war are often challenged and politicized. Hegemonic groups, political elites and others in positions of power pontificate about the war with a view to controlling the history and interpretations of the past. Resistance to such control is sometimes expressed in 'counter-narratives' or in an overt manner. Nigerian government's official position holds that the war was an Igbo rebellion, and efforts have been made to construct post-war memories to align with this perception. With the benefit of hindsight, it is safe to conclude that the process of reconciliation adopted at the end of the war accounted for the shallow understanding of the events surrounding the war and the politicization of war memories. Four decades after, the issues and problems that led to the war, the developments and dynamics of its prosecution, the politics and reconciliatory efforts of the post-war era remains contested with obvious implications for the Nigerian state.

It is incontrovertible to state that memory politics has played a crucial role in the contestations and competing narratives which have attended Nigeria's protracted 30-month civil war. These contestations and competing narratives occur at different levels, from above and below, and from the centre to the periphery. From the standpoint of the peculiarity of 'memory politics' and its associated discourses, these competing perspectives have been manipulated for political purposes by all the interested parties: the Igbo, other (majority and minority) ethnic groups in Nigeria, and the Nigerian state. The immediate issue that arises relates to 'how capable the nation-state is in forging a national identity'? The nation-state appropriates symbolic expressions of national

identity, history and historiography, and translates these into a nationalist enterprise with undeniable political intentions. Based on an understanding of 'memory' as a tool produced and shaped by ideologies, processes of identity formation and nationalism, history and historiography have been appropriated by the state in order to forge a grand narrative and a basis for legitimacy.

Extant studies document the manner through which national governments seek to control the very 'sources' of professional historiography by limiting (or controlling) access to state archives (Wilson 1996). This becomes pertinent owing to the fact that the hegemony and legitimacy of the nation-state and that of its groups and classes are heavily composed of representations of a national past (Alonso 1998). Olick and Robbins (1998: 126) argue that these processes are 'accomplished through the related strategies of naturalization, departicularization, and idealization', which means that the tools of historical reconstruction are not easily available to competing groups or other claimants. As Foucault (1977) remarks, the critical nature of memory makes it a very important factor in the struggle, and the control of a people's memory translates into the control of their progress. To ward off the potential power of a dominant nationalist (historiography) narrative, Foucault formulates the idea of a 'counter-memory' that differs from, and often contests, dominant discourses. Olick and Robbins (1998: 126) point out that these resonates broadly with the tendency over the years to redirect or restructure historical inquiry away from the nation-state as a unit of analysis in favour of other suppressed groups and perspectives hitherto excluded from mainstream or traditional accounts. In the same vein, oral historians like Thompson (1988) perceive

their undertaking as a way of giving 'history back to the people in their own words', a process which Olick and Robbins (1998: 126) perceived to be more democratic than other historiographical methodologies by virtue of its ability to provide alternative viewpoints which are often disenfranchised.

In essence, the dominance of 'national memory' over other memories was one of the ways in which the Nigerian state has excluded other contestants to memory, thereby, forging, circulating, reifying, and reflecting the formation of national identity for primary allegiance. Even, when counter-memories to this dominant approach are employed, more often than not, they present essentialist notions of authenticity. This is replete in the manner through which ethnicity within the discourse of the Nigerian civil war is amplified to mythical proportions, with obvious metaphysical analysis holding sway to the detriment of critical theoretical reflections. Efforts to understand this process articulates 'memory' as a continuous process of resistance and contestation (or a public sphere), in which official and unofficial, private and public inter-relate (Johnson et al; Lipsitz 1990; Wallace 1996). The 'struggle for possession and interpretation of memory', as Thelen (1989) puts it, 'is rooted in the conflict and interplay among social, political, and cultural interests'.

### **5.3.1. *Writing the War***

Murray Last (2000: 326) identifies four broad phases in the literature on the Nigerian civil war. For him, the first set of literature is made up of instant analyses produced by authors who had access to publishers in Europe and to the European market. The

second comprises the literature that emerged out of a period of comparative silence characterised by accounts of those who had started to come to terms with experiences of the war and had started to rebuild their lives. The third phase of writing is mostly dominated by a handful of memoirs of the major participants in the conflict, which includes the work of Njoku (1986), Essien (1987), Saro-Wiwa (1989), Ogwu-Oju (1995), Iroh (1982), Nwapa (1975) and Achebe (1972). While the final phase is basically dominated by the womenfolk who experienced the war first-hand, produced 'counter-memoirs' that emphasised untold stories, less-heroic account of events and uglier aspects of the war. As Last (2000: 327) observes, these war narratives did not only constitute an obstacle to the actual account of what really transpired, but they have been entrenched in propaganda and appear in different contexts as truths.

In September 2001, historians, political scientists, policy makers and some of the major actors in the war gathered under the aegis of the Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies (PEFS), University of Ibadan, Nigeria, for an International Conference on the 'Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath'. The papers presented at the conference were published in a book, titled: 'The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath (2001)'. Nigeria's Head of State during the war, General Yakubu Gowon (rtd.) delivered the keynote address at the conference, but his views resonated deeply with the hegemonic discourses and narratives regarding the war. Gowon declined to adopt the term 'Nigerian civil war', which he referred to as a political coinage. In a bid to qualify the different stages of the conflict, he supplanted the term with expressions like 'police action', 'military action' and 'full military action'. The popular post-war mantra of 'No

Victor, *No Vanquished*' was flagged, and claims that the wounds of the war had healed were also reiterated. Gowon's views lends credence to other official narratives that claim that 'what happened in, and to Nigeria during the period should be better seen and judged not through the lenses and perspectives of a civil war...a better description of the conflict would be the Nigerian War of Unity' (Akpan 1985: 166).

On a dissimilar note, the accounts of Philip Effiong, the former Second-in-Command of the Biafran Forces, who was saddled with the responsibility of submitting the instruments of surrender to the FMG after the defeat of Biafra, was clearly at odds with Gowon's account. Drawing attention to the hidden and offensive accounts of the war, Effiong revisited the plight of Nigeria's numerous ethnic minorities who suffered untold hardships as a result of the war, and different allegations of unwarranted brutalities and massacres of harmless civilians perpetrated by federal troops. This resonates with Okafor's view in his chapter titled: 'The Nigerian Army and the Liberation of Asaba: A Personal Narrative', where he gave an account of an act of genocide carried out by federal forces on the Igbo minority population of the Nigeria's Mid-West Region. M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu's contribution echoed the marginalisation of the Igbo, a notion which has remains widespread four decades after the war. Ikiddeh's account of the Ibibio experience presented a conflicting position which points to the reality of the unevenness of the war throughout Nigeria.

Official perspectives on the war either falsify or relegate crucial issues about the war to the background. Gowon understated the importance of the 'Aburi Accord' at the



conference, an agreement brokered in Ghana which he himself was a part of. Some narratives on the war tend to suggest the 'inevitability of the war' by alluding to the mixed signals which emerged from Aburi and a perceived secessionist desire by the Igbo. For instance, Falola and Heaton (2008: 174-5) in their report on the 'Aburi Accord' remark that 'Gowon believed the federation had been preserved at Aburi while Ojukwu claimed the Aburi agreement gave him wide-ranging powers to control the Government of the Eastern Region, and even to secede from the federation if he so chose'. But this elicits confusion when one considers a prior opinion expressed by Gowon where he attributed the non-implementation of the agreement the fact that:

*'law officers and ... able Permanent Secretaries examined the official communiqué they found that some of ... (the) decisions, too rapidly made at Aburi, were impracticable; they found that the agreements made were somewhat out of touch with the legal and economic facts of life and it was impossible to embody them into effective edicts' (Clarke 1987: 87).*

In a similar fashion, Murray Last's (2000: 315) account resonates this same tendency when he reports about the needless loss of lives and properties, and the huge expenses incurred due to the war 'especially since before the fighting started the Aburi accords had given Ojukwu everything he had been demanding'. Having drawn considerably on Last's account on the challenges of reconciliation in post-war Nigeria, there is a sense in which he succeeds well in that enterprise. However, Last's venture into critical pre-war issues such as the 'Aburi Accord', does not only expose the limitation of his knowledge, but reveals how his analysis diminishes into irritating 'errors' or 'falsehoods'. In addition, Falola and Heaton's (2008: 175) narrative suggest that the major reason for opposing

the secession of Biafra which ultimately led to the war had to do with the belief of the FMG and Gowon 'in the practicality of Nigerian unity' which it was prepared to fight for and defend. This view is obviously at odds with the main aim of the mutineers which was 'Araba' – (a Hausa word meaning 'let us separate') in the July 1966 counter-coup in which the Igbo Head of State, Aguiyi Ironsi was assassinated and other senior army officers of Igbo ethnic extraction were executed.

### **5.3.2. Teaching the War**

In actual fact, there seem to be apathy on the part of the government to teach the history of the Nigerian civil war in schools, and a stance that it is better to forget the war as a whole.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the American Civil War which is consciously been taught in American schools, the Nigerian Civil War is not officially listed on the list of courses in the national curriculum for history education in Nigeria.<sup>31</sup> Hence, four decades after the war, there is still no generally acceptable account of the war. When the issue of the war arises in history class discourses, it is the official and institutionalized interpretation of the war that is offered to young Nigerians in schools, and these come across as a powerful educational tool in school curricular and textbooks (Eluwa et al 1988; Duze 1985). In this manner, official accounts of the civil war find expression in the domain of education, curriculum design, and textbook writing. These have become powerful vectors through which the facilitation and dissemination of official narratives have been

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<sup>30</sup> See Jordan Hartt, 'Chris Abani's Search For a National Literature', *Centrum*, <http://www.centrum.org/writing/2008/03/chris-abanis-se.html> (Accessed: 16 March 2010).

<sup>31</sup> See Akachi, O. 2009. 'Remember to Forget': The Nigeria-Biafra War 'History' and Memory Politics'. Paper submitted for the *Eleventh Berlin Roundtables on Transnationality on the theme: Memory Politics: Education, Memorials and Mass Media*, 21<sup>st</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> October. He makes this point citing the National Universities Commission (NUC) Courses and Curriculum Guidelines for Nigerian Universities.

projected. Memory contestations are common over the 'correct' manner to interpret the war, and curriculum and textbook writing are enmeshed in these contestations. Hence, textbooks, curricula and schools have emerged as battlegrounds and sites of contestations for curriculum developers, teachers, bureaucrats, politicians and policy makers to compete and to shape the narratives taught to younger generations.

In order to harness and shape the perspectives of the younger generation, the authors of most of these textbooks used in Nigerian schools emphasize the perceived positive effects of the war like the creation of states, creation of employment for the military and the attainment of nationhood (Duze 1985: 198-199). These views are backed, and echo the official views of the Nigerian government which denies and belittles Igbo issues connected to the war. On the contrary, these textbooks ignore the ethnic question connected to the civil war, the pogrom against the Igbo which preceded the war and gave rise to Igbo secessionist attempts, the use of hunger as a legitimate weapon of war by the Nigerian government, and the denial of Biafran national symbols (flag and national anthem). In the post-war era in Nigeria, 'Biafra' became a taboo word, the southern stretch of Nigeria's Atlantic coast known as the 'Bight of Biafra' was renamed the 'Bight of Bonny'; and the oil pumped from this area, known as, the 'Biafra Light' is now called 'Bonny Light'. When General Gowon stated that 'the Biafran sun is set forever', it was a tacit approval to purge all emblems, paraphernalia, publications and memorials related to the existence of Biafra. These developments reinforce the official position that Biafra never existed and downplays the gravity of what happened between 1967 and 1970.

These errors and falsehoods represent a larger problem within the context of documenting and accounting for the Nigerian Civil War. It shows, among other things that the Nigerian state is yet to fully imbibe the lessons of the war. The competing narratives attendant to the civil war provides room for ethno-nationalism to thrive in the Nigerian public space, and fails to give vent to a basis for the realisation of a collective self-examination. These half-hearted commentaries on the war reinforce the fragile unity of the Nigerian state, and this is replete in the wave of agitations for self-determination by different ethnic nationalities in the country. While there is definitely so much to be learned from a proper account of the civil war, the exact history of the war as it should be taught in schools, homes or to the younger generation is yet to be researched, in that sense, the Nigerian Civil War is not the past, but very much part of the future.

### **5.3.3. *Memorials and Museums***

Memories inherently exist in sites and are associated with inanimate objects like monuments, museums and other public spaces which reflect some form of collective meaning (Attfield 2000; Miller 2001; Myers 2001). With reference to memorials and museums, two distinctions have been attempted as they relate to remembrance. Klep and Perkins (2009: 1) link memorials 'to an emotive engagement with traumatic events of the past ... something that affects the visitor and is linked strongly with ideas of respect for the dead, the acknowledgement of suffering and the transcendence of the politics of now'. For them, museums are linked to pedagogic tendencies in that 'it places

the event in the past in relation to the present (and the future) in a specific way through narrativisation'. Intrinsicly, there are tensions associated with memorials and museums as sites of memory, this is due to their importance to truth claims, identities and other aspects of human life (Climo and Cattell 2002: 18). Both memorial and museum constitute a site for power struggles and a focus of contestation, and they are important for social and cultural continuity within an ethnic, religious or national space, spanning generations, identities and other categories.

In reconsidering and reshaping nationhood to suit official interests, the Nigerian government has employed 'memory power' inherent in memorials and museums to reconstruct the post-war Nigerian space. First, the National War Museum (in Umuahia, Abia state-South East Nigeria) stands as the only museum that represents the memories of the civil war in Nigeria. The museum has only military exhibits on display, with a motto that reads: 'That they did not die in vain', referring to those who fought and died on the federal (Nigerian) side. This representation excludes accounts of those who fought and died on the Biafran side; millions of Igbo (civilian men, women and children) who died as a result of the FMG-imposed 'starvation'; and those who were cut down in cross-fire during the war, among others. Second, the Nigerian government commemorates an annual Armed Forces Remembrance Day for the 'Unknown Soldiers' every January 15, to coincide with 15 January 1970, the date that Biafra officially surrendered to the FMG which brought an end to the war. This commemoration serves as an event to honour all federal 'fallen soldiers' who fought and died in all wars the country had engaged in, including, the two World Wars, the civil war, peacekeeping

missions and others. It therefore, does not memorialize the civil war which ended on this date as doing so may amount to lending validity, credence and legitimacy to Biafra. The epitaph ascribed to the 'fallen soldier' refers to Nigerian soldiers, since the Biafran soldiers were regarded as 'rebels' or 'renegades'.

In a nation attempting to transcend a difficult past, this official account excludes groups and perspectives of people whose history is intertwined with the war. In this context, the setting up of the National War Museum and its location in southeast Nigeria (Umuahia) by the Nigerian state represents not only a proof of conquest, proprietorship and ultimate incorporation, but is central to its attempt to stake claim to the territory and constitutes a key reminder of the defeat of the Igbo-Biafran cause. These attempts by the Nigerian government to exclude alternative or competing perspectives from official accounts of the war, and create institutions to produce and preserve a collective 'official' memory of the war were crucial in sealing the victory. While the immediate post-war phase in Nigeria was increasingly marked by 'reconciliation' with the intended cultural, political, social and economic appropriation of the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region, Igbo-Biafra memory was recontextualised and incorporated into a dominant national narrative through memorials and museums, and what was supposed to serve as a Biafran Museum was reintegrated into the national museum project.

#### **5.4. Identity and Nationalist Narratives**

Sets of memory repertoires like commemoration, monuments, artefacts, traditions, myths and symbols are usually employed in identity and nationalist narratives. These

memory repertoires are experienced across geographical spectrums, simple and complex societies, and they find expression in various disciplines: sociology, anthropology, history, political science, psychology, arts, literary criticism and other disciplines. Halbwachs (1992) delineates different kinds of memory articulations, ranging from autobiographical memory, historical memory, history, to collective memory. For Halbwachs, autobiographical memory is the memory of those events that we experience ourselves; historical memory is the memory that we acquire through historical records; history is the past as we remember it, with which we no longer have an organic relation and which is no longer an important part of our lives; and collective memory is the active past that forms our identities. While all these forms of memory provide dispersed insights into how a 'group' or 'society' appropriates them, Halbwachs argues that 'it is only individuals who remember, even if they do much of this remembering together' ... thereby characterising 'collective memory as plural' (cited in Olick and Robbins 1998: 111).

This evokes the spectre of a 'collectivist tendency' which Fentress and Wickham refer to as 'a concept of collective consciousness curiously disconnected from the actual thought processes of any particular person' which may render 'the individual a sort of automation, passively obeying the interiorized collective will' (cited in Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). Hence, some perspectives tend to be weary of the term 'collective memory', and it is sometimes supplanted by 'cultural memory' referring to memory that is shared outside the scope of established historical discourse, but which is still permeated with cultural products and meaning (Sturkin 1997). Others refer to 'social memory' instead of

'collective memory' (Fentress and Wickham 1992), while some use the term 'images of the past' in relation to 'political cultural profiles' (Olick and Levy 1997). For Assmann (1992), four modes of memory are distinguishable: mimetic memory - referring to the transmission of practical knowledge from the past; material memory – referring to the history contained in objects; communicative memory – which relates to the residues of the past in language and communication; and cultural memory – which has to do with the transmission of explicit historical references, consciousness and meanings from the past. This brief review offers a perspective that refers to 'memory studies' as an inquiry (both academic and popular) into the varieties of ways through which we are individually, collectively or historically configured by the past, consciously or unconsciously. The contestations, challenges, and intertwining of the past and present inherent in these processes leads to 'memory politics' or the 'politics of memory'.

A major mechanism for constructing identity is a coherent narrative which is often deployed to 'authorise and represent' a communal identity (Said 1984). While Anderson (1991) attributes the development of the national to the advances in the print media (novel and newspaper), it has become evident that group identity can also be forged through the telling and retelling of certain historical narratives of the nation (Said 1984; Layoun 1988). As White (1978) argues, narratives can be used to uphold certain social values and norms, to support conservative social conditions, and ultimately to construct a shared identity by giving events and processes a new meaning. Igbo traditions of origins and myths tend to make meaning of its past, a meaning that is pronounced and made real through the processes of narratives which accords power to authority or



events. Narratives are 'the instruments by which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse' (White 1981: 4), a feat which is achieved by appropriating chronology and giving it 'a structure, an order of meaning' (Ibid: 5), thereby creating a sense of truth. Invariably, it is in the process of structuring of a narrative from beginning, middle and end, that meaning is created in the narrative (Cowley 2001: 84), 'for meaning always involves retrospection and reflexivity, a past, a history' (Turner 1981: 152).

#### **5.4.1. *Narratives of the Igbo Nation***

Current Igbo efforts at self-determination have depended largely on Igbo perceptions of a historical narrative within Igbo cultural tradition. The most important of this history is the narrative on the origin of the Igbo which casts a veil of authenticity on the genuineness of the Igbo nation. Several studies (Roseberry and O'Brien 1991; Swadenburg 1991; Kugelmass 1995) outline the imperatives of the relationship between an understanding of the teaching, dispersion and ownership of history on the one hand, and others (Irwin-Zarecka 1989; Watson 1994; Kugelmass 1995) have dealt with the relationship between this history and memory on the other hand. This link is has proved critical for a complete articulation of the Igbo nationhood by MASSOB as they strive to develop their own peculiar identity within the context of the Nigerian state. Presently, manifestations of Igbo nationalism has drawn not only on written history, but also on narratives linked to their tradition of origin. This is a narrative that links the Igbo to 'oriental' tradition of origins. The first identifies the Igbo as one of the lost 'Ten Tribes of Israel'. The claim to Hebrew origins is closely linked to the autobiography of Olaudah

Equiano (1794: 25-28, cited in Falola 2005) an ex-Igbo slave who wrote 1789. This claim has been given some academic credence by the work of G. T. Basden (1912: 246-247) who points to close similarities between Igbo culture and Jewish culture, but without necessarily affirming that the former descended from the latter. Other narratives trace 'Ancient Biafra' to Cush, Cush being the ancient name for Ethiopia. This link is heavily immersed in Bible prophecy and the claims for Biafra is tied to one of the books of the bible authored by an ancient prophet of Israel, known as Zephaniah (Chapter 3: 9 – 20). Neo-Biafran movements in Nigeria link the prophecies in this portion of the bible to the specificities of what was going to befall the Biafran-Igbo nation in the future.

The reconstruction of Igbo national identity weaves into a colourful and insightful connection with the Jews which has earned the Igbo the reputation of being known as the 'Jews of Africa'. The significance of these narratives is not lost on young Igbo youths who have effectively drawn on these narratives to situate their political identity squarely within the context of the Nigerian state and to defend their political position in it. The evocation of the 'Igbo-Jewish' link elicits a historical narrative of both nations as victims of similar historical injustices. In a pamphlet, titled: *'Complete Revelation on Biafran Quest: The Present Nigeria and Beyond'* (2004), Chukwudiegwu (2004: 16) outlines a series of prophetic utterances which emphasises the religious dimension to the Igbo-Biafra struggle in Nigeria. Among other things, he asserts that:

*'... All these happenings are in sequence to what Jehovah has planned to do before the end of 40 years wilderness expiration of the Igbo in Nigeria.*

*40 years of suffering and persecution in the hand of gentile Nigeria the enemy of the Jews and of the Israelites of which the Igbo represents’.*

Chukwudiegwu (2004: 16-17) further adds that:

*‘The 1966 killing of General Aguiyi Ironsi and other Igbo in the North was the beginning of the sorrow of wilderness journey of the Igbo ... The name ‘Nigeria’ is not a ‘nation’, but a powerful evil spirit of wickedness and slavery, scourge and pains of sorrow (in no distant time you will see that Nigeria is not a nation). At 40 years Jehovah will bring the captivity of His people to an end. The scripture has many things to say of the Israelites concerning 400 years, 40 years, 40 days, and 4 days’.*

There is emphasis on the prior existence of Biafra before to the creation of the Nigerian state by the forces of British colonialism. According to the Regional Leader of MASSOB in Lagos, Callistus Eze,

*‘Biafra was formed from a proclamation made by the Portuguese missionaries over 700 years ago ... The name Biafra was in the map of Africa (close to the Gulf of Guinea) before the civil war, ... after the war ended in 1970, the federal government removed it from the map of Africa’ (quoted in Saturday Champion 13. 05. 2008).*

Against this background and to buttress the claim of prior existence of Biafra, Chukwudiegwu (2004: 17) reveals that:

*‘Biafra were dragged into this mess called wilderness in the year 1960 when their freedom was taken by the British government who dragged her and her people with the help of some Igbo agents into Nigeria for sandwiching and suffering though it is the act of Jehovah to penalise us for our idols and strange gods in our midst’.*

The Igbo perceive the Jewish history of promise, slavery and freedom as synonymous with that of the Igbo nation as it strives to articulate its past, present and future. The place of Biafra on the map of Africa is held in prominence in this narrative which locates Biafra in close proximity to Cush, which is referred to as Ancient Ethiopia (See attached map). These narratives are embedded in 'unchecked' religious utterances and they demonstrate how members of MASSOB appropriate certain aspects of Igbo past and link it to the present. The meanings associated with these narratives provide a platform for a 'counter-narrative' in the quest for Igbo nationhood outside the framework of the Nigerian nation-state.

#### **5.4.2. *Narratives as Myth of Cultural Identity***

Narratives of the Igbo nation embedded in stories and tales constitute a myth of cultural identity which plays a decisive role in defining and producing the Igbo national identity. The formation of this identity was pre-eminent in uniting and mobilising the Igbo for an independent state in 1967 outside the ambits of the Nigerian state. The Igbo narrative is grounded in a myth that has enabled and strengthened a collective cultural identity, and has accommodated values and beliefs of its own, ultimately setting up the criteria for uniqueness. In definite terms, a myth comprises 'one of the ways in which collectivities ... more especially nations ... establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own systems of morality and values ... a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself (Schopflin 1997: 19). In and of itself, myths have become more than a simple story by virtue of its ability to express what is 'natural' to this world, through a process of 'naturalisation' which makes self-evident the basic

presuppositions and values of a people (Overing 1997: 5). The myths surrounding the construction of identity are foundational in the sense that they 'deal with the multiple faces of power which endow a people with their images of selfhood by stating sets of identity criteria for a people and a community' (Overing 1997: 16).

Narratives coalesce and produce the essential elements for the building and cohesion of a shared national identity. Where members of a community have fought for their freedom and independence, and have been subjugated and defeated as in the case of the Igbo nation in Nigeria, narratives tend to serve as a rallying point for future action. The narratives presented above forms the focal point around which members of MASSOB and other neo-Biafran movements build a collective identity. They have also been deployed to defend their political position and to counter the dominant or grand narrative of the Nigerian nation-state, portraying it as one that must necessarily undergo extensive political revisions in order to give its constituent ethnic groups the right to self-determination. In the following section, efforts are made to unravel the extent to which these narratives are highlighted in the activities of MASSOB and emergent forms of Igbo political resistance in Nigeria.

### **5.5. Bringing Memory Back In: Youth and 'Memory Politics'**

The significance of the challenges confronting the Igbo nation in Nigeria is not lost on its younger generation. Largely composed of young Igbo adults most of whom were born after the civil war in Nigeria, MASSOB has connected with the history of the war and tapped into a narrative that has effectively linked the present and the past in the

struggle for Igbo self-determination. Most Igbo youths who make up the movement did not suffer the brutalities of the war, some did as children but could hardly give a vivid account of their experiences, except for the fact that most were raised in a difficult and unique post war Nigerian context which offered little or no opportunity for self-actualisation. The narrative of the Igbo nation espoused in the preceding section describes a 'glorious' past, but is intricately linked to the present, affording these youths the opportunity to reconnect with the memories of past events in order to build their own political identity.

Theorists of nationalism have argued that youth mobilisation remains central to the rise of nationalist movements (Smith 1986; Anderson 1991). Shared memories passed across generations are critical to forging collective identities. As Mannheim (1952 [1928]) points out, political and social occurrences configure youth culture through critical shared experience during its formative years. By ranking several historical events in terms of their perceived significance, Schuman and Scott (1989) note that memory plays out differently in different generations, but that the period of adolescence and early adulthood which is often linked with 'youth' is the primary period for the generational imprinting of political memories. Consequently, new generations define and position themselves against older generations, and assume a different relation to the past, different from their elders (Shils 1981). With reference to Africa, current literature on youth draw an inevitable link to contemporary social processes like 'ethnic militia' movements, 'vigilantism' and the phenomenon of 'child soldiers' (Diouf 1996; Durham 2000; Gore and Pratten 2003; Nolte 2004), while others attempt to reverse this

tendency to criminalise youth (Momoh 2000). To understand youth as a category which 'spearhead contemporary political contests between the politics of identity and citizenship' (Gore and Pratten 2003: 212), such as MASSOB, it is necessary to connect our understanding of youth to ways in which social and physical maturation intersects with perhaps the most salient identity (resource) on the continent-ethnicity' (Adebanwi 2005: 347).

The memories upon which most Igbo youths are building their political identity are not the same memories which older generations of the Igbo currently harbour. For most of the older generations who harbour bitter experiences of the war, memories of the war should rather be forgotten since for them there seem to be no appetite to engage in such a venture presently. However, for these youths, thirty (30) months of Igbo massacre is not simply being eliminated, but being reinvented. This reinvention has led to a drive and initiative to create illegal and alternative public spheres outside of state structures in order to push for self-determination. Linking the past to the present required not only 'reinventing' or 'reinterpreting' the past, but redefining the present to fit with the newly reconceived shape of the past, therefore, their views about the present becomes crucial in this enterprise. These views are expressed in open violation of government order, taking up parallel governmental functions, engaging in different acts of civil disobedience and challenging the absolutist authority of the Nigerian state in the entire south-eastern Nigeria.

### **5.5.1. *The Meaning of the Past: Ralph Uwazuruike and the Struggle for Freedom***

Since the end of the civil there has been a boom in collective Igbo memory in Nigeria. This memory boom is anchored on references to the genocidal intent of the Nigerian state during the war and the destruction unleashed throughout the southeast of Nigeria, and this serves as a mobilising tool, for both the eyewitnesses of the war and those born after the civil war. On account of the fact that individual and collective memories are inextricably intertwined, the stories of individual lives form an important base for both personal and social identity. As Cattell and Climo (2002: 12) argue,

*'memory define our being and humanity as individuals and in collectivities ... the individual consciousness by which we recognise ourselves as persons, and the collective consciousness by which groups identify and organise themselves and act with agency, arise from and are sustained by memory '... 'Individual's' relationships to time and memory are highly subjective and individual',*

But memories shared with others allow those who did not actively participate in the events to incorporate them indirectly into their memory collection (Climo 1995; Ishino 1995).

Personal and collective memories converge in individual lives. Personal life narratives are mediated by the social environment that shapes the stories themselves. For Chief Ralph Uwazuruike, the leader and founder of MASSOB, who hails from Okwe in Imo State (Southeast Nigeria), the objective conditions of his own life shared by many Igbo youths predisposed him to embark on the struggle for the realisation of the Biafran



dream. Uwazuruike was trained in India where he studied political science and law, and was inspired by 'Satyagraha' Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance which he studied for ten years. He also understudied Odumegwu Ojukwu (the ex-Biafran leader) and the extensive literature produced on the Nigerian-Biafran war. While in India, Uwazuruike honed his skills in political activism and served as the president of the Nigerian Student Organisation in Bombay. His life history aptly draws from the limitations that were placed on him as an Igbo in the Nigerian state. He was born in 1958 in the South-eastern town of Okwe, and undertook his primary and secondary education in Okwe. At the time the Nigerian Civil War broke out in 1967 Uwazuruike was about nine years old. According to him, it was the sight of his five-year old sister who died of kwashiorkor right before him while their mother went to buy some drugs for her that fanned in him the dream to resuscitate Biafra. He blames the death of his sister on the Nigerian government who introduced the 'blockade policy' to isolate Biafra by land, air and sea, thereby, preventing any relief efforts from going into the territory.

In several interviews, Uwazuruike has recalled how he experienced the ravages of the war and some of his narratives require a recollection. Among other things, he recounts that:

*'[On 27 May 1967], I was a kid in the East. I went to register into the boy's company of the Biafran army, twice, but due to my tender age, I was not taken. I have a very ugly memory of the Biafran war, because my kid sister, Mary, died in my arms – she suffered from Kwashiorkor. Then, there was this routine check by our parents. In the morning they would leave their houses for the bush to search for the enemy. We called it*

*'combing' during the war. So, that fateful day, my father went for combing and my mother ran to the market to buy drugs. She was on her way when Mary died in my [sic]. I cried out and neighbours came out and helped. I felt I should revenge [sic] the death of that child. So many families lost people through that way. And the death of such innocent people will not go unpunished. So, ab initio, I knew I would fight the cause of Biafra from then' (The News 10. 04. 2000).*

This narrative is also explicitly outlined in Uwazuruike's autobiography, titled: *'The Struggle for Freedom'*. Given Uwazuruike's position as the leader of MASSOB, his autobiography and memoirs have played a crucial role in mobilising Igbo youths, a development which lends credence to Connerton's (1989) assertion, that memoirs and autobiographies of famous citizens and political elites are worth remembering owing to their propensity to make radical changes in society. In this context, individual memory ties into 'social memory' without which the former will remain 'an abstraction almost devoid of meaning' (Connerton 1989: 37), this affiliation bias, according to Ross (1991: 197) 'colours the form and content of remembering at all ages and across generations'. Hence, 'nearly all personal memories are learned, inherited or, at the very least, informed by a common stock of social memories' (Brundage 2000: 4; Casey 1987; Connerton 1989; Schudson 1995).

### **5.5.2. Memory Repertoires and Political Contention**

From the previous sections, it is clear that the Nigerian state, despite its inherent division along ethnic, regional, religious and generational lines, has often exhibited the tendencies to dominate memory production, although, without complete success. The

use of memory devices by the state and the adoption of counter-memories by opposing parties manifest themselves through various devices in diverse ways. These devices do not merely reflect past experiences, but serve the most important role of being orientational in their function (Schwartz 1996). Presently, MASSOB has adopted images, symbols and narratives of the past, and a particular version of Igbo history as vehicles for establishing their claim for self-determination. This has involved the use of commemorations, anniversaries, flags and Biafran artefacts to articulate alternative versions of Igbo identity and to claim a unique place in the Nigerian state.

Symbolic practices are inherent in the exercise of power. Governments have rituals and symbols, and governance relies on stories, signs and symbols that convey and reaffirm legitimacy. As Hunt (1984) points out, legitimacy, in a sense, implies a general agreement on signs and symbols. The emergence of MASSOB and its challenge of the legitimacy of Nigerian state necessarily negate the 'absolutist' view of the Nigerian state as the sole founder and main guarantor of law and order. As such, MASSOB has invented or 'recreated' political symbols that aims to express accurately the ideals, principles and claims of the movement for self-determination. The following sections examine the efforts of the state in containing alternative narratives, and contestations arising from a demand by the Igbo to reverse the past and project a new Igbo identity.

#### ***(i) The Politics of Commemoration***

The politics of commemoration is shaped through symbolic means and rarely involves the use of direct force. Crisis situations provide the opportunity to use symbolic and

ideological tools to support and legitimate a particular identity through images of continuity. The particular form of commemoration concerns 'who' or 'what' should be preserved. Since the emergence of MASSOB in 1999, the movement has out rightly rejected the official commemorations relating to the civil war, such as, the Armed Forces Remembrance Day and the other monuments relating to the war, but commemorates every May 30 to mark the anniversary of the founding of Biafran nation on 30 May 1967. Commemoration, memory and identity fuse together in a manner that reinforces contemporary Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. This produces an agenda that emphasises collective Igbo goals, a consciousness of desired ends and the use of various forms of power.

Appropriately, MASSOB draws on memories of violence perpetrated against the Igbo after the Eastern Region seceded from the Nigerian federation in May 30, 1967. Since this violence was carried out on a people (the Igbo) with one identity, MASSOB recalls this memory and ties it into Igbo identity. The commemoration are carried out in observable ceremonies and are always disrupted by State Security Services and the Nigerian Police Force, but more importantly, these ceremonies have become rituals that is characterised as 'a rule-governed activity of a symbolic character that draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling they hold to be of special significance (Lukes 1975). These practices have engendered political goals, like organisational integration, legitimation, construction of solidarity and inculcation of political beliefs (Kertzer 1991: 87), and invariably 'channels emotions, guides cognition, organises social groups, and by providing a sense of continuity, links the past with the

present and the present with the future (Kertzer 1988: 9-10). Of crucial importance is to understanding that groups are not just followers or partakers in rituals, they also create these rituals and these makes ritual a powerful tool for political action (Kertzer 1988: 12). MASSOB seeks give voice to some major transformations in Igbo history with a view to emphasizing the structural, symbolic and narrative aspects of its power in its struggles with the Nigerian state.

***(ii) Flags and Emblems***

Flags and emblems are critical memory repertoires which nations draw on to mark significant events in their past. The flag is a potent symbol for all nations, and the use of flags conjures up notions of ultimate statehood and unity. On the contrary, the choice of an alternative flag by MASSOB reflects the crisis of nationhood and citizenship in Nigeria. Since May 2000, when MASSOB symbolically hoisted the Biafran flag and officially presented the Declaration of Demand for a Sovereign State of Biafra from the People and Government of Nigeria, the flag has remained critical to its activities. The green-red-black Biafran flag has come to be a powerful symbol and reminder of Biafran nation and Igbo nationalism. There have been various successful and unsuccessful attempts to hoist the green-red-black Biafran flag in major roads, streets, bill boards and strategic places in the South-eastern states of Nigeria. At all MASSOB rallies, most members of the movement carry the Biafran flag to show their allegiance and patriotism to the quest for self-determination, and these events are always marked by clashes between the movement and the State Security Services. Representations of Biafra, one of the most important being the emblem of the 'Land of the Rising Sun' serve as a

crucial reminder of self-determination. The 'Rising Sun' has eleven stars which represents the eleven tribes of Israel. The Igbo regard themselves as one of the lost tribes of Israel and the twelfth one missing somewhere in Africa.

### ***(iii) Biafran Literatures and Materials***

For MASSOB, the proliferation of poorly produced literatures, pamphlets, newspapers, handbills, posters, banners, among other materials serve as a means of claiming the South-eastern urban space for their cause. The depiction of these materials with out right political messages in the public transforms the public space, streets and major roads in the region into a political space. This brings to fore the manipulation of the public spaces to reflect the aims and objectives of MASSOB in the region. The dotting of several strategic spaces with these materials means that the public spaces are taken over by these political messages, and the public is forced to consume them on account of the fact that they cannot be avoided. In a sense, the public constitutes the 'willing' and 'unwilling' consumer of MASSOB politics. While the willing consumers are those who advocate and support the movement's quest for self-determination, the unwilling consumers are those who are forced to encounter these materials even when they see them as objects of political propaganda.

### ***(iv) Biafran Images and Objects***

MASSOB also employs the use of powerful images and objects to give meaning to the quest for self-determination. In several raids on the movement's hideouts across the South-eastern, Biafran military uniforms, belts, umbrellas, currencies, stickers, pictures

of Biafran soldiers in military uniforms in training camp, Biafran documents, sewing machines and an almanac of Biafran hierarchy have been discovered. These images and objects are critical in the sense that they are consumed, manipulated and displayed in such a way that forces their consumption to create an environment of political awareness. MASSOB activists are not only intent on making the quest for Igbo self-determination visible within Nigeria, but they also intend to be reckoned with globally and in the international community. Hence, in addition to political protests and civil disobedience, images and objects are appropriated as effective ways of getting their message across to the domestic and global audience.

***(v) Biafran Attires***

The use of Biafran t-shirts, mufflers, face caps have constituted contemporary items of resistance against the Nigerian state. Biafran t-shirts, cardigans, mufflers and face caps have been worn by MASSOB activists who engage in protests and demonstrations in streets, town halls and in other public arenas. Like other Biafran materials, the t-shirts, mufflers and face caps are portrayed against the overall background of the Biafran colour (Green-Red-Black), and the strong preference for these attires is evident among the young men in the movement who are more confrontational in their attitude and stance on self-determination. The preference for this relatively confrontational strategy is indicative of the rebellious stance of the movement against the state, a tendency which resonates with other youth-dominated nationalist groups globally. The wearing of these attires indicate not only a social choice of consumption, but also a political choice based on their interpretation and reaction to certain developments within the Nigeria

state, and the need to locate their sense of identity and place within such contexts. In a sense, these attires have become a popular national symbol of protest and remembrance in the public spaces across the entire region.

#### ***(vi) Biafran-Igbo Heroes***

Apart from carrying pictures of imprisoned and murdered members of MASSOB during political rallies and protests, members of the movement also exhibit picture placards of Igbo heroes, Biafran soldiers in uniform and other eminent Igbo personalities. Some of the personalities that are referenced include: Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745 – 31 March 1797), who was also known as Gustavus Vassa. He believed to be Igbo and was captured as a slave at a young age. He eventually bought his freedom and became of the most prominent Africans involved in the British movement for the abolition of the slave trade; the other is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904 – 1996) who was at the forefront of the nationalist struggle for Nigeria's independence; Chinua Achebe (1930 - ?) the author of 'Things Fall Apart' and Africa's most acclaimed and fluent writer of the English Language; and Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu (1933 - ?) who led Biafran secession from Nigeria between 1967 and 1970, among others. The manipulation and display of these pictures, and reference to these personalities lends the struggle and the movement a human face.

#### **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter began with an examination of how the Nigeria state has been contested in recent times. With specific reference to the Igbo experience in Nigeria, the chapter



draws on developments after the civil war in 1970, the narratological dualism which the war engendered, both in terms of teaching, writing and commemorating the war, and how this has produced contested memories which have played out over time in a political context. The chapter has shown how members of MASSOB, most of who were born after the war, have drawn on a collective sense of Igbo heroics and achievements in the past, and the present experience of deprivation, marginalisation and injustice against the Igbo within the context of the Nigerian nation-state. MASSOB has connected with the history of the war and tapped into a narrative that has effectively linked the present and the past in the struggle for Igbo self-determination. This brings to fore the role of memory in identity formation, both for individuals and members of a community.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Igbo Diaspora, Ethnic Nationalism and Self-Determination

#### 6.0. Introduction

The literature on the African diaspora is diverse, particularly, with reference to the experience of different ethnic groups in Africa who still maintain strong ties with their diaspora communities. But as Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002: 212) observe, most literature on the African diaspora deal essentially with issues related to culture and the 'survival of African cultural practices in the New World or the representation of home in the process of diasporic identity formation'. While such issues remain important, less attention is paid to the complex linkages between the diaspora and 'homeland' politics, only a few studies have examined the role diasporic networks play in the well-being of their kith and kin on the African continent. Of crucial importance to the politics of the diaspora is the manner with which diasporic African communities link up with political struggles on the continent, thereby, transforming indigenous ethnic movements through diasporic political activism. This reiterates the need to reconceptualise the African diaspora to move beyond the category of slave diasporas and their descendants, to include new diasporas that are products of new patterns and processes associated with recent migrations, and who are now actively involved in their homeland politics.

In recent times, diaspora groups of Ogoni and Igbo ethnic extractions in Nigeria have played an active role in their homeland conflict. While they became important vehicles for confronting different authoritarian regimes in their home-country and exposing the perceived human rights abuses meted out on their kith and kin, they were significant in

lobbying the global community to push for structural changes in the relationship between their respective ethnic groups and their home-country. The effectiveness of diaspora intervention has been dictated by social and political leverage, the views of their host society and government on the conflict, and the political and social character of their homeland country (Bercovitch 2007). The stake of diaspora groups in homeland conflict is influenced not only by the impact of these conflicts economically, politically or socially, but also by how these conflicts affect their identity and how their host state view the conflict (Shain 2002). As expressed by Dudley and Lloyd (2006: 56), in the operation of diaspora politics, a lot would depend on 'how diaspora communities identify with the cultural and political life of their homeland'.

The concept of the 'diaspora' is sometimes susceptible to a usage that makes it lose its explanatory or descriptive value. To avoid the risk of an outright generalisation of the concept, it is pertinent to define the term and to be reasonably precise on how the term is deployed in this study. Given the impact the Igbo diaspora has on contemporary political developments in Nigeria, theorising and analysing the Igbo diaspora and homeland politics has become increasingly important. The present study defines the Igbo diaspora as diasporic Igbo communities living outside Igboland, organised on the basis of shared interests and collective identities, and demonstrating a feeling of loyalty and kinship to their original Igbo homeland. This delineation focuses on three types of Igbo diaspora communities and their different levels of operation. The first deals with the '*internal*' Igbo diaspora, which involves Igbo communities outside the Igbo homeland (or states) who are scattered across different cities and urban centres in

Nigeria. The second involves the *'regional'* or *'continental'* Igbo diaspora, relating to Igbo communities outside Nigeria who are based in the West African sub-region or those based in different countries within the African continent. The third level involves the *'Atlantic'* Igbo diaspora, referring to those Igbo communities in Europe and North America. The first section of this chapter maps out the 'Igbo diaspora', and examines the concepts, definitions, delimitations associated with term, particularly, during the different periods of Igbo diasporic formation. The major section examines the activities of the three levels of Igbo diasporic communities outlined above. This is with a view to examining their social, cultural and economic influences, and how these are deployed from their base to promote the concerns and interests of their homeland.

### **6.1. Delineating the Concept**

The term 'diaspora' derives from the Greek word *'diaspeirein'*, meaning the dispersal or scattering of seeds (Bercovitch 2007: 18; Sheffer 2003). Its roots in ancient Greek comprise two elements: *speiro* (to sow) and *dia* (over) (Cohen 1997). For the Greeks, the word diaspora indicates 'productive colonisation, a positive movement for all concerned', but following the enslavement and exile of the Jews in ancient Babylon, the word diaspora assumed a more negative connotation (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002: 216). In recent times, diaspora is generally linked to persecution, involuntary dispersal of a people, and the endless search and longing for an authentic homeland. While the initial usage of the concept referred to the dispersal of the Jews from their historical homeland (Akyeampong 2000), it has come to apply to new diaspora groups or other 'victim' diaspora groups, like the Koreans, Chinese, Kurds, Mexicans, Tamils, and

particularly to Africans, through the experience of the Atlantic slave trade, to Palestinians through Zionist territorial expansionist policies, and to Armenians owing to their persecution by the Ottomans, among others. While all these occurrences point to the forced dispersal of people, Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002: 216) argue that term has been stretched to accommodate 'voluntary and proactive movements of people and the connections between them'. This broadened view resonates with the arguments of Lavie and Swedenburg (1996: 14) that calls

*'for re-imagining the 'areas' of area studies and developing units of analysis that enable us to understand the dynamics of transnational cultural and economic processes, as well as to challenge the conceptual limits imposed by national and ethnic/racial boundaries'.*

In terms of general theories relating to the term *diaspora*, the works of Safran (1991), Clifford (1994) and Cohen (1997) remains the most commonly cited. But from the foregoing, it is evident that the term remains contested, dynamic and altered over time, and the manner in which the term is operationalised differs among groups depending on their ideological persuasion. The fact that not all 'emergent' diaspora communities are products of traumatic experiences points to the need for 'exactitude' and 'adaptability' in theory-building. As Bercovitch (2007: 18) points out, 'its appropriation by, and application to a variety of vastly different ethno-cultural groups, many of which may bear little similarity to archetypal dispersed peoples, ... is indicative of the semantic malleability of the label'. However, Bercovitch (2007: 18) affirms that a common string that runs through all diasporic communities is their settlement outside their original or imagined homeland, and the recognition that their homeland still foists some claim on

their loyalty, emotions and level of possible support. This opens up the possibility of a proliferation of contacts and exchanges with their homeland, which may be military, political, cultural and financial in nature. Given the heterogeneity of diaspora groups and communities, their identity formation and relations with specific homeland are largely influenced by generational, ideological and political persuasions.

The increased processes of globalisation, the proliferation of ethnic conflicts and the globalisation of discourses on human rights and self-determination at the end of the Cold War have transformed diasporic groups into important international political forces. These processes have also intensified diasporic groups' links with their kith and kin, and have furthered their ability to intervene and influence conflicts in their homeland. Prior to this time, boundaries, territoriality and sovereignty defined all conflicts between the state and its constituent units, and these conflicts were largely perceived as concretely confined to a specific space. The proliferation of sub-national ethnic conflicts occasioned by post-Cold War tensions, coupled with increased globalisation, migration and mobility of goods, ideas and people threw up sub-groups and other non-state actors as important players in internal conflicts. As a result of these influences, diasporas have now emerged as politically vibrant actors who are capable of influencing events within their own homeland and outside by way of influencing foreign policy action targeted at their own home state. Diasporic groups now possess enormous resources and have access to international organisations, global media or influential host governments, thereby, acting on the international scene and influencing events beyond one territory.

### **6.1.1. *From the General to the Particular***

Broadly speaking, the expression 'African diaspora' traditionally refers to all people of African descent outside the continent. According to Shepperson (1993: 41), the term seems to have emerged between mid-1950s and mid-1960s, a period which roughly coincided with end of formal colonial rule in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, and the struggle against racism and for civil rights in the United States. Still, Shepperson (1993: 43) argues that the origin of the concept of an African diaspora is traceable to the 19<sup>th</sup> century struggle to shield the African continent and its people from the emergent prejudice that Africa played no significant part in world history, famously summed up by G.W. Hegel in the 1830s that 'Africa was no historical part of the world' and that it possessed 'no movement or development to exhibit'. This assertion initiated a flurry of reactions from eminent representatives of Africa and the diaspora in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as, Edward Blyden, Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell and James Africanus Horton who all argued that to the contrary on the idea of an African-centred development and of Africans being makers of their own history (Adi 2002: 240).

Owing to the political contestations attendant to the concept, the immediate problem that arises is that defining the meaning of 'diaspora' sometimes amounts to a mere academic exercise. This tendency surfaces as one of the main problems of Nigerian or African diasporic theorisation in general. Another crucial problem that emerges relates to mapping the spread of diaspora communities. While much attempt is focused on the 'Atlantic diasporic communities' who were slave diasporas, this proves to be inadequate to the extent that it fails to recognise not only the post-slavery and post-colonial

diasporas, but also other diaspora communities in Africa which are intra-state and continental in character. The complexities of flows, movements and displacements suggests that rather than conceptualising the diaspora as comprising well-established and organised communities abroad, attention should be focused on multiples sites of diasporic settlements, which may also include: refugees and exiles who are products of violent conflicts occurring in their homeland and who still embody the consequences of these conflicts; and stateless diasporas, comprising irredentist and secessionist groups residing outside the country.

#### **6.1.2. *Mapping the Igbo Diaspora***

The tendency to migrate has been a defining characteristic of the Igbo ethnic group prior to the colonial era. Igbo clans have been traditionally linked with trades and professions which have involved migrating outwards to new horizons and areas of influence in culture, trade and politics. In the last half a century, the Igbo like other Nigerian and African ethnic extractions have been part of the global migration patterns that have been marked by the movement of people, not only to big urban centres and cities within countries and continents, but also from developing societies to developed ones. This section attempts to map different phases in Igbo diaspora formation, with a view to identifying the uniqueness of the Igbo experience, the extent, condition and relationship of the diaspora with 'Igboland'. Following Uduku (2002: 302), this study identifies four main phases of significant Igbo movement and diaspora formation: the first is from the pre-colonial era up to the end of the slave trade at about 1850; the second is from the colonial and early post-colonial era till about the mid-1960s; the third



phase constitute the movement of refugees during, and immediately after the Nigerian-Biafran war; and the last phase comprises the present era of migrations and movements which are linked to the global economic recessions in the 1980s and 1990s, the intensification of adjustment programmes and economic reform in most African countries, and the increased processes of globalisation and opportunities for communication, modes of travel, and movement of ideas and people.

***(i) First Diaspora Period***

While a detailed account of the slave trade goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is pertinent to state that the location of Igboland, characterised by slave routes which crossed each other repeatedly, was strategic in this obnoxious trade in humans. Figures emanating from major slave ports indicate that between 1730 and 1830, the number of slaves exported from the Bight of Biafra accounted for about ten or twenty percent of the total African slave exports to the New World (Northrup 1976). Drawing on documented research, there are indications that the bulk of the slaves transported from the Bight of Biafra to the plantations in the West Indies and the New World were of Igbo ethnic origin (Curtin 1969; Craton 1974; Lovejoy 1989; Gomez 1998). This is the first diaspora generation which is commonly linked to those who experienced the slave trade and were transported to the West Indies and the New World before the end of the slave trade around 1850. There are also occasional oral narratives and records of freed slaves like Equiano (1793); returnees like Fyffe (1962; 1972) who were products of emancipation and had accepted the offer of resettlement in West African towns, such as Freetown or Monrovia; and missionaries and mission agents (Waddell 1970; Ajayi 1965;

Ayandele 1966). Gugler (1961) buttresses this point by citing the existence of an Igbo Union in Freetown in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with group affinities with the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria.

***(ii) Second Diaspora Period***

The second Igbo diaspora generation were those who embraced the benefits of Western education with all the opportunities and vistas it could offer. During the colonial period, the dominant presence of the Igbo in the Nigerian colonial civil service where they occupied lower grade clerical positions in Western and Northern Nigeria, the Igbo became known as the 'Jews of Africa'. This period was equally marked by a significant number of Igbo who settled in '*Hausaland*' in the North, and '*Yorubaland*' in the West, and other major cities in Nigerian from the late 1940s to the early 1960s (Osaghae 1994; Peil 1992). Outside the borders of Nigeria, the quest for higher education or the 'better life' outside the shores of the country drove a lot of Igbo families, villages and communities who could afford it to send their 'promising' sons for further education abroad.

Uduku (2002) points to the unique tendencies in the identity, form and function of Igbo communities which existed during this period in North America/Europe, Africa and within Nigeria, with the formation of hometown improvement unions for two principal reasons. The first was to cater for the need of the diaspora community and to help in the transportation of the body of deceased members or their close family back to their Igbo homeland for final burial. The second was aimed at improving the welfare and

development of the hometown community through the construction of schools, hospitals and other community development projects, and sometimes contributing to scholarship funds to enable promising Igbo youths to receive training as doctors, lawyers and engineers. Uduku (2002: 304) remarks that the overwhelming tendency of Igbo diaspora groups in this era was to align with the ethnic town union and concentrate on local issues of hometown politics rather than other wider issues related to ethnicity and political power within the Nigerian state.

### ***(iii) Third Diaspora Period***

The third and distinctive Igbo diaspora generation comprises those who were forced to migrate before, during and immediately the Nigerian-Biafran civil war (1967-1970). The events of the period forced many Igbo to move to their Igbo homeland, neighbouring West African countries, and to distant lands in Europe and North America. The civil war could be regarded as the most important singular event in the formation of Igbo ethnic identity and solidarity, and it proved to redefine the relationship between the Igbo diaspora within Nigeria and their host communities. Having lost most of their properties and assets during the war, Igbo diaspora communities which re-emerged in Western Nigeria and Northern cities began to channel substantial amounts of development activities to their hometown associations and villages. In economic and political terms, this period initiated the contemporary manifestation of Igbo unions as it presently exists. First, the collective identity developed prior to the war served to form the basis for a shared Igbo identity in the diaspora. Second, Igbo unions and organisations outside

Igbo land, but within Nigeria mobilised for political participation and dominated politics in the Eastern region.

***(iv) Fourth Diaspora Period***

The fourth generation of Igbo diaspora refer to those which lack a clear cut demarcation from the immediate post-war period, but combines the diasporic movements associated with the global economic recessions in the 1980s, the deepening crisis of structural adjustment and the increased processes of globalisation up to the current era. Remarkably, the character of Igbo diaspora has changed considerably during this period. This is not unrelated to the increased processes of globalisation which unleashes opportunities for diaspora formation and dramatically influences the ability of diaspora movements. Changes associated with technology, communication, modes of travel, movement of ideas and people, and harmonisation of cultures have radically transformed the ability of diasporas to build, nurture and sustain strong links with their homeland (Bercovitch 2007: 19). This diaspora group seem to very close to their homeland owing to the benefits of electronic money transfers, fast international air travel and other global developments that are currently placed at their advantage.

**6.2. The Igbo Diaspora: Identity, Networks and Associations**

Byfield (2000: 2) argues that 'the creation of a diaspora is in a large measure contingent on a diasporic identity that links the constituent parts of the diaspora to a homeland'. This raises the critical role of identity formation in understanding diaspora communities. Patterson and Kelley (2000: 19) observe that 'we must always keep in mind that

diasporic identities are socially and historically constituted, reconstituted and reproduced'. While alluding to the framework under which this occurs as being structured along cultural, legal, economic, social and imperial lines, Patterson and Kelley (2000: 20) argue that what is constant is that 'the arrangements that this hierarchy assumes may vary from place to place but it remains a gendered hierarchy'. For Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002: 218) the forces and tendencies that shape the identities of diaspora communities are complex and dependent on several factors, and 'individuals within diaspora are infinitely free to determine their own identities'. Ethnic identity in this context may be refashioned or recreated in the diaspora, as a response to either a hostile treatment by the host or by the need to project power beyond their host community into the homeland.

A diaspora community suggest a kind of community with a sense of shared consciousness and of de-territorialised affinity, which spawns and influences a common political, cultural, economic or ideological aspiration. Against the background of complexities and overlapping tendencies in diaspora communities, diaspora questions inevitably connect issues of identity-based networks and associations. These networks and associations may be based on certain identities and cultural affinities, but they also have the capacity to reinvent themselves and exploit existing opportunities. In this context, networks and associations emerge at the local, state, national and international level with the certain tendencies which are geared towards specific goals.

### **6.2.1. *Diaspora Networks and Associations***

As earlier stated, diaspora configurations can be seen to embody certain shifting, multiple and overlapping identities which make them susceptible to different practices, and with different implications for their involvement. But as Cohen's (1997) categorisation puts it, a fundamental element in diaspora configuration lies in their support for a homeland. This tendency reiterates Al-Ali, Black and Khoser's (1999: 7) argument that 'activities which sustain or support the society and culture of the home country within the exile community are considered by both communities to be equally important in shaping the future of the country'. Based on the findings of a recent project (Ndofor-Tah 2000), hometowns associations, ethnic associations, religious associations, alumni associations, professional associations, political groups and national development groups in the diaspora, among others, are capable of engaging in a number of activities of developmental importance. While these organisations support development projects of various kinds, they also serve as nationalist projects with implications for the diaspora community and their beneficiaries in the homeland.

Drawing on Mohan's (2002) classification, there are three inter-related dimensions for examining the positive linkages between diaspora communities and development. This chapter intends to explore Igbo diaspora activities with the lenses provided by this classification. The first relates to *development in the diaspora*, where people, who are members of diasporic communities leverage on their localised diasporic connections within the host country to guarantee their social and economic well-being, by so doing, contribute to the development of their locality. The second involves *development*

*through the diaspora*, where diasporic communities utilise their diffuse global connections beyond the locality to facilitate economic and social well-being. The third is the *development by the diaspora*, where diasporic flows and connections back home expedite the development, or creation of 'homelands'. However, while these categories exist, the relationship between them is vague and volatile, and captures the inherent tensions in diasporic configurations themselves. This has obvious implications for the Igbo diaspora experience which is subsequently examined in this chapter.

### **6.2.2. 'Internal' Igbo Diaspora**

Since the end of the civil war, the emergence of the internal Igbo diaspora within Nigeria has largely been a product of notable social, economic and political transformations, like the civil war, structural alterations in the federation, deepening crisis of political transition, and economic liberalisation, which all combined to transform the ethnic landscape in the country. These developments led to waves of migration and settlements, and to what Osaghae (1994: vii) refers to as 'migrant ethnic empire building'. These empires existed alongside conventional ethnic unions, and while it is commonly assumed that they are primarily concerned with the development of their ethnic homeland, to which they are attached and will ultimately return to (Barnes 1975; Southall 1988; Trager 1988; Little 1969; Gulgar and Flanagan 1978), Osaghae argues that these migrant ethnic empires rather 'seek to create ethnic homelands away from home'. Specific issues of 'temporality' or 'permanence' of Igbo diaspora communities in Nigeria deflects from the main theme of this study, but it explores both perspectives with a view to examining the prevalent strategies of ethnic action in both contexts.

Igbo diaspora identity fluctuates between the clan/village, town and pan-Igbo group level which reflects the sub-group and macro-group realities. The Igbo have a sustained history of associational ethnicity in the diaspora. The Igbo State Union which was formed in Lagos in 1923 and had branches all over the country was the second major ethnic union in Nigeria (Osaghae 1994: 45). In Kano (Northern Nigeria), the Igbo diaspora there maintained close links with their homeland from where they took wives, built houses, and still participated in major traditional practices and festivals. Pointing to what Nzimiro (1965) described as 'a classic example of a welfare association', diaspora Igbo ethnic unions were basically formed to meet the welfare needs of their members. Some of their activities include securing jobs for the new unemployed migrant, providing a monthly stipend for the unemployed until they were fully rehabilitated, supporting members in financial needs, supporting members in funerals and marriage ceremonies, providing soft loans for members in financial distress, and establishing schools (primary and secondary) for the large population of Igbo children in diaspora (Osaghae 1994: 46). On the home front, these diaspora ethnic unions were involved in developing their homeland by executing projects related to the building of town halls, schools, post offices, and providing scholarship schemes in their homeland. At the pan-Igbo level, development efforts were geared towards the Eastern Igbo states as whole, but this did not alter the solidarity of members to their sub-groups. Osaghae (1994: 49) points out that at the pan-Igbo level, contributions were made towards the building of Airports, instituting educational foundations and development projects at various levels in the entire Igbo homeland.



Moreover, developments after the civil war in 1970 served to forge stronger ethnic ties and loyalty among the Igbo returnees to the diaspora. The immediate effects of these closer ties were replete in the manner of spatial settlements which saw Igbo returnees to Northern and Western Nigeria settling in close proximity in certain areas of the North, like *Tudun Wada* and *Sabon Gari* neighbourhoods, and those in the West settling in areas like *Maroko*, *Ajgunle*, *Amukoko*, *Ilasa* and *Bariga*. Uduku (2002: 305) argues that the idea of settlements in close proximity fostered the development of a 'supra diaspora' or Igbo national identity, as opposed to a sub-group Igbo identity. Emanating from this is the ability to coherently organise for defence or evacuation in periods of conflict, particularly in Northern Nigeria where ethnic and religious conflicts are rife. Another major consequence of the civil war was that Igbo diaspora communities in Nigeria perceived their identification and relations with their host community as transient. Igbo villages and hometown associations emerged as beneficiaries of this development as massive funds and development projects were channelled to them. At the personal and group level, planned financial activities were initiated to bolster individual house-building projects and capital-intensive hometown development projects in the Igbo homeland (Uduku 2002: 305).

With the advent of the IMF/World Bank-instituted Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the attendant ethnic tensions that characterised its implementation, there was an increase in the positive uses of ethnicity by diaspora Igbo communities in Nigeria (See chapter three for a detailed discussion on this issue). But the convoluted political

transition programme between 1986 and 1993 threw up different forces of change. Diaspora Igbo professional groups and Igbo socio-cultural groups began to align with pro-democracy forces from other sections of the country to agitate for a power shift from the North to the South. By the time political power finally went to the South after Nigeria's return to civil in 1999, pent up tensions and grievances had already given way to the proliferation of ethno-nationalist movements throughout the country. MASSOB emerged in September 1999 within the context of these changes and by May 2001, and despite the relentless intimidation by the States Security Services the movement succeeded state chapters and zonal offices throughout the entire South-east and in the Niger Delta (PM News 14. 05. 2001). The leadership of the movement organised periodic rallies to commission different local, provincial and regional chapters of the movement in some major towns of the former Eastern region of Nigeria and in the entire country (BNW 2002). The suppression of the movement accounted for the publicity and the impressive growth it recorded during this period. For most Igbo youths between the age of 18 and 30, it was typical to approach officials of the movement to enlist for membership (Adekson 2004: 90).

### **6.2.3. 'Regional' Igbo Diaspora**

Bersselaar (1998: 61) points out that the earliest indication of the existence of a 'regional' Igbo diaspora is traceable to Sierra-Leone where an Igbo diaspora community developed as a result of the decision by the British to abolish slave trade in 1807. The attempt to put an end to the trade in slaves continued for another two decades (Northrup 1976: 358), but the slaves 'recaptured' by the British naval squadron on the

coast of West Africa were returned to the colony of Sierra Leone due to the impracticability of returning them back to their places of origin. Prominent among these returnees were Igbo slaves who number 1,231 out of a total of 13, 273 recaptives, according to 1848 figures on the ethnic origins of recaptives, making them the second largest group after the Yoruba (Curtin 1969: 245). Sierra Leone proved to be a hub for most educated West African elites from different ethnic groups, including the Igbo and Yoruba, as they embarked on the development of indigenous ideas, emancipation of the African population and the development of the continent (Davidson 1992). With the passage of time, the Igbo community received tenses competition from the Creole identity into which they were forced to melt into owing to the capacity of the latter to indigenize diverse ethnic groups (Knörr 2008). Many Igbo became part of the larger Creole group, but Igbo identity did not disappear entirely since many Igbo of Creole community still identify themselves as Igbo (Skinner and Harrell-Bond 1977: 314).

Apart from the regional Igbo diaspora who find themselves in neighbouring countries as a result of the slave trade, there are others who reside in these countries as a result of recent migrations. Notably, many Igbo people fled their Igbo 'homeland' in Nigeria to these destinations during and after the civil war, but other migrations have been products of Igbo individual entrepreneurial spirit which have taken them to some neighbouring West and Central African countries like Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, and further to other sub-Saharan Africa countries, like Kenya and Zimbabwe. With the emergence of MASSOB and the revival of the sceptre of 'Biafran identity' for the first time since the end of the Nigerian-

Biafran civil war in 1970, many regional Igbo diaspora became fully involved in the Biafran struggle. This led to the opening up of regional offices by MASSOB for two main reasons: first, to register new members in the diaspora; and second, to disseminate information regarding proposed events and appraise members of recent developments in those countries that could affect the movement and its diaspora constituency (Adekson 2004: 90).

One of the ways in which regional diaspora nationalism has materialised has been through the mobilisation and use of the Biafra pound for business transaction by Igbo traders who are vibrant in the busy frontier markets in neighbouring countries like Benin, Togo and Ghana (Owen 2009: 588). A source on the Biafran pounds, confirmed that:

*'This is the money that is being spent by some Igbo communities in Ivory Coast. Many of them are travellers. On their way to other parts of West Africa, they stop and exchange the currency for the Naira with them... I think they are trying to make a statement with the money...some of the people, who have the money, are not selling it because they are looking forward to a time when the Biafran Republic will come to stay'* (Sunday Punch 05. 06. 2005 cited in Owen 2009).

The same source hints that the currency seemed to appreciate in value further away from its source to the West: Benin – Togo – Ghana – Cote d'Ivoire. This speaks to the symbolic and historical meaning attached to the currency, thereby producing a legacy that is hinged on historical significance, network-embedded trust and future aspirations of a homeland (Owen 2009: 589).

#### **6.2.4. 'Atlantic' Igbo Diaspora**

The civil war and its consequences did not only drive the Igbo into their ethnic enclave and other neighbouring countries, it also led to a number of Igbo migrations to the United States and North America. Most of these migrants facilitated the transformation and repositioning of Igbo diaspora communities as centres of collective supra-Igbo identity for information, news, and fund-raising for the Biafran cause (Uduku 2002: 305). These changes led to the joining of forces between Igbo ethnic unions and Biafran organizations and had lasting effects on Igbo diaspora communities abroad. The effects of the war shaped the orientation and political relations of Igbo diaspora groups and their ties with the homeland. At the individual level, the war and its effects prolonged the stay of some Igbo people abroad, for others the idea of returning to Nigeria was totally abandoned, but still, those who returned on account of the relatively short-lived oil-boom in the economy retained their ties and links abroad (Uduku 2002: 305).

The economic and political awareness developed during this period spawned the establishment of contemporary forms of Igbo unions in the diaspora. Remarkably, this period witnessed the emergence of supra-ethnic Igbo associations, like the United States based World Igbo Congress, an Igbo umbrella group which has social, economic and political aims all tied into one (World Igbo Congress 1999; 2000; 2001). The strength of the group lies in the support of its affiliate<sup>32</sup> and associate groups which are linked to

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<sup>32</sup> Some its affiliate groups include: Igbo Union Atlanta, GA [www.igbounionatlanta.org](http://www.igbounionatlanta.org); Igbo People's Congress, Austin, TX; Umunna Association, Chicago; Igbo Organization of New England, [www.igbonewengland.org/](http://www.igbonewengland.org/) ; Igbo Community Association of Nigeria, Dallas/FW; Igbo Organization of

the grassroots Igbo communities in the diaspora.<sup>33</sup> In a communiqué issued in 2001, the Congress called on the Igbo diaspora to invest in education, technology and small scale industries in the Igbo homeland of Eastern Nigeria (World Igbo Congress 2001). The aims of the Congress has expanded to include the provision of basic educational facilities in schools in the South East, the commencement of a soccer programme for Igbo youths in the East and the provision of scholarships to Igbo students from the South East of Nigeria.<sup>34</sup>

While the internal Igbo diaspora were much more committed to protecting their kith and kin in Northern Nigeria, the Igbo diaspora outside Nigeria, particularly, in Europe and North America have become veritable tools of making remittances to their kith and kin at home. Immigration and employment is also important because of the severe economic conditions in their home country, and also due to the need to go and work where job is available. Even in the age of multiculturalism, Igbo diaspora communities still continue to retain their substance and way of life by observing 'New Yam' Festivals to promote their original identity. However, there are cases of conflating identities in

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Greater Miami Valley of Dayton, OH; Igbo Cultural Association of Michigan; Igbo People's Congress Houston, TX; Igbo People's Congress, Kansas City; Igbo Cultural Association of Southern California; Igbo Association of Southern Florida; Igbo Union Nashville, TN [www.igbounionnashville.org](http://www.igbounionnashville.org); Igbo USA, New Jersey; Igbo Bu Igbo New Jersey; Nzuko Ndi Igbo, South Jersey; Ndi Igbo Development Foundation, New Orleans, LA; Igbo Organization of New York; Nwannedinamba, Washington, DC; Igbo People's Forum of Philadelphia; Igbo Association of Tampa Bay, Florida; Umunne; Cultural Association of Minnesota [www.umunne.org](http://www.umunne.org) ; The Nne Ji Ndi Igbo of Greater Cincinnati, OH (See the organization's website: [www.wicfoundationinc.org](http://www.wicfoundationinc.org)).

<sup>33</sup> Abia State National Association, USA; Anambra State Association, USA [www.anambrastateusa.org](http://www.anambrastateusa.org); Ebonyi State Association USA; Enugu State Association, USA; Imo State Congress USA; Anioma Association, USA.

<sup>34</sup> See the website of the organisation: [www.wicfoundationinc.org](http://www.wicfoundationinc.org).

situations when some members of the Igbo Diaspora have been compelled to take on their host country's nationality and assimilate into mainstream activities, while paying mere lip service to the 'authentic' Igbo diaspora identity. This holds true, particularly for those Igbo in professional fields where the adoption of the identity of the host country ensures career progress. The new generation of Igbo born in the diaspora are mostly assimilated in the culture of the host country, but there are emerging interests among this group to find their roots. Recently, a group of Washington, D.C.-based Igbo high school students mobilised funds for a historic 'Igbo Village Project' in Virginia, and the Illinois-based *Umu Igbo Alliance* made up high school and college age Igbo youths are pioneering an Igbo renaissance project for all Igbo youth organisations in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

### **6.3. Igbo Diaspora Nationalism and 'Homeland' Politics**

The notion of 'homeland' is critical to the ethnic and national identity of a diaspora community. For the diaspora community, the territory and living space underpin the security of the homeland, and serves as a space for exclusive identity formation and a centre for a collective national identity. This elicits the tendency for 'exclusivity and purification of space' (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002: 230), and as Cohen (1997: 106) points out, 'just as the evocation of "homeland" is used as a means of exclusion, so the excluded may see having a land of their own as a deliverance from their travails in foreign lands'. Van der Veer (1995: 5) argues that certain unique qualities of group

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<sup>35</sup> These events were some of the highlights of the 8<sup>th</sup> Igbo Studies Association (ISA) International Conference, which I attended at Howard University, 9-10 April, 2010.

formation in exile often play a prominent role in the formation of nationalist discourse. This spawns a political vision linked to the cultural imagination of a homeland and the desire to belong among the diaspora community, as a result, providing the incentives and support for nationalist groups in the homeland (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002: 230).

### **6.3.1. *Igbo Diaspora and Contemporary Struggles for Self-Determination in Nigeria***

Existing evidence links the resurgence of self-determination struggles by the Igbo in diaspora to certain developments within Igbo diaspora communities in the late 1990s and early 2000s. At the global level, developments connected with the end of the Cold War had given way to agitations for democratic reforms in different parts of the world, including much of sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, the prolonged political transition programme (1986-1993) was intentionally subverted by the military, leading to a further aggravation of the tensed political climate in the country. By the mid-1990s, increased calls began to emerge from some members of the Igbo ethnic nationality in Nigeria and the diaspora for the actualisation of 'Biafra'. The nucleus of the diaspora aspiration for self-determination has been traced to a Chicago-based Igbo group, known as, *Ekwe Nche Movement*, which was founded in 1996 and still remains active today in the quest for Igbo self-determination. Emerging initially as research organisation aimed at addressing and finding a solution to the plight of the Igbo nation in Nigeria, *Ekwe Nche*



*Movement* gradually became the precursor of the 'Igbo Renaissance Movement' and the 'Biafra Actualisation Movement'.<sup>36</sup>

Some major developments which constituted the bulwark of the movement's activities were the inclusion of the 'Igbo-American' diaspora population in its activities and the incorporation of the Igbo groups in the diaspora.<sup>37</sup> With the approval of its application for a non-profit status group, *Ekwe Nche* became a 501 (c) (3) organisation on 1 July 1998. The movement has since been the acclaimed world-wide based organisation of all Igbo of American, Cuban, Haitian, Jamaican and African descent among others, and at the forefront of Igbo tradition and culture. The organisation performs research functions which aim at promoting the spiritual, cultural, educational, civic, social, literary, scientific and benevolent advancement of the Igbo. But more importantly, with reference to article 4 of its 'Articles of Incorporation', the movement harbours a nationalist agenda, which include: seeking actively to prosecute those responsible for perceived crimes of genocide against the Igbo; facilitating the accurate dissemination of information that can be used to stop all forms of genocide perpetrated against the Igbo worldwide; and striving for the unity of the Igbo toward the realisation of a sovereign and independent Igbo nation-state. While *Ekwe Nche Organisation* shares similar social, economic and cultural characteristics with the United States-based Igbo umbrella group, World Igbo Congress, it however, appears to harbour far-reaching political views in its

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<sup>36</sup> The origin, evolution and activities of Ekwe Nche Movement are gleaned from its website: <http://ekwenche.org/aboutus.htm>. Professor Michael Mbanaso (Howard University, Washington, D.C) also provided some helpful insights on this organization during my personal communication with him.

<sup>37</sup> The movement refers to Igbo-American diasporas like Jacob Charruthers (PhD), Anderson Thompson (PhD), Austra Ford (Prof.), Eze Ndubuisi and pan-Africanist Nicholas Thompson as elder statesmen.

quest to deploy Igbo culture, tradition and philosophy, not necessarily as an end in itself, but as a means to an end, namely, the actualisation of the 'Republic of Biafra'.

Since the advent of *Ekwe Nche Organisation*, a motley collection of Igbo diaspora groups and organisations in North America and Europe have joined the movement for the revival of the Biafran project. Some of the neo-Biafran groups in the diaspora include: the Biafran Foundation (BF), Igbo USA, Biafra Nigeria World (BNW), Biafran Liberation Movement (BLM), the Biafra Actualisation Forum (BAF) which is affiliated to *Ekwe Nche Organisation*, and the United Kingdom-based *Nzuko Ndigbo*. Over the years, this heterogeneous diaspora arm of the neo-Biafran project has initiated and implemented a number of significant activities and events towards the realisation of its goals. One of the most eventful in these series was the acquisition and popular opening of the 'Biafra House' in Washington, DC, on 23 September 2001. The event which was attended by the former Biafran leader, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, members of the World Igbo Congress (WIC), Igbo USA and Biafra Foundation (BF) was clearly of immense symbolic and ideological importance to the Biafran struggle. The original aim of the 'Biafran House' and other international offices was to coordinate the international and diasporic activities of the neo-Biafran project, forge closer ties between pro-Biafran Igbo diaspora and provide awareness concerning Igbo activities and organisations. But the choice of a building only four blocks away from the White House is deliberate in order to accord some legitimacy to the quest of the Igbo nation for a separate state. This influences the international recognition of the movement and the legitimacy of the struggle, and

brings international pressure to bear on the Nigerian state to recognise the self-determination rights of the Igbo nation.

In a bid to strengthen their attachment to 'home' and raise awareness among the Igbo population in Nigeria, diaspora neo-Biafran groups have established a United States-based communications outfit that combines a radio station and a weekly newspaper, known as, the Voice of Biafra International (VOBI). This shortwave radio broadcast service transmits on 15.28 MHz (on 19 meters band) every Friday at 20.00-21.00 Hours UTC (Universal Time Coordinated). This is equivalent to 9. pm – 10. pm Biafraland Time.<sup>38</sup> On 18 October 2003, members of the Washington-based Biafra Foundation (BF) and Biafra Actualisation Forum (BAF) convened the first International Conference on Biafra in Greenbelt, Maryland, United States. The conference adopted a passionate communiqué, part of which reads that:

*'With representation from Eastern Nigeria, Anioma, Europe, and throughout the United States of America and Canada, the first post-war International Conference on Biafra was concluded with the agreement that the conditions that led to the Biafra-Nigeria war are still present and worse, that the persecution of Ndi-Igbo in Nigeria continues to dictate the overall and specific policies of the federal government. The effect of this has been the gradual destruction of the country itself, its economy, and its overall pride' (Biafra Foundation 2003).*

Among other things, the communiqué issued called on the Nigerian government to convene a conference of all its ethnic groups within six months. With the expiration of

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<sup>38</sup> See the Voice of Biafra International (VOBI) at: <http://www.biafraland.com/vobi.htm>.

the ultimatum on 18 April 2004, the Biafran Government in Exile (BGIE) was formed to commence the process of establishing an independent government for the people of the Sovereign Republic of Biafra. Presently, Dr. Emmanuel Enekwechi, a US-based psychologist currently serves as the Prime Minister of the Biafran Government in Exile (BGIE). On the home front there are initiatives to put in place a Biafran shadow government. The commemoration of the annual 'Biafra Day' every May 30, which corresponds with the declaration of the defunct Republic of Biafra in 1967, is now a permanent feature of all neo-Biafran groups in the diaspora. The events are marked by peaceful demonstrations, public symposia, display of Biafran flags and artifacts in support of the struggle for self-determination in Nigeria.

### **6.3.2. *MASSOB and the Internationalisation of the Struggle for Self-Determination***

Since 2007, a number of neo-Biafran groups have emerged on the domestic front, particularly after the leadership crisis that weakened the movement which resulted in the advent of splinter groups from MASSOB. But MASSOB remains the most dominant group on the home front and is still believed to maintain close ties with the neo-Biafran diaspora groups. Unlike the old Biafran secessionist movement in the 1960s which relied solely on propaganda, support and recognition from foreign countries, MASSOB realised that taking the struggle beyond its national borders in a globalised era required a host of new strategies, tactics, networking and politics. MASSOB and other diaspora-based neo-Biafran groups that support and fund its activities have made periodic representations to various United Nations bodies, the African Union and international human rights organisations to present their case for self-determination. MASSOB's self-determination

campaign and activities are well known in African countries such as Gabon, Mali, Ghana, Cameroon, Cote 'd'Ivoire and Congo Democratic Republic where there are large concentrations of Igbo. In July 2000, the leader of the movement and some of its members stormed the venue of the 36<sup>th</sup> Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Lome, Togo, in a bid to secure international recognition for the Biafran cause and were arrested by security officials (Uwazuruike 2004: 149; Vanguard 17. 7. 2000).

To a large extent, MASSOB has also been influenced by the struggles of indigenous peoples in other parts of the Developing World who are in similar struggles against states that are perceived to be oppressive. The professed commitment of the movement to the principles of 'non-violence' has been linked to the refusal of the UN to recognise the adoption of violence in the pursuit of self-determination. Having this in mind and recalling the lessons learnt from the Nigerian-Biafran war, the movement's 'non-violence' principle has enhanced its relationship with concerned parties and potential sympathisers like the UN. In view of this, MASSOB sent the Biafra Bill of Rights to the United Nations shortly after its emergence. Though, the movement failed in its bid to secure the Biafran Bill of Rights at the United Nations, it was subsequently recognized as an unrepresented nation by Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) under United Nations Resolution 1514 of 1947.<sup>39</sup> MASSOB has reportedly taken its case to the Obama administration shortly after its inauguration on 20 January 2009 (*Daily Sun* 23. 1. 2009). However, in a remarkable quest reminiscent of

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<sup>39</sup> The UNPO is an NGO and not an agency of the United Nations. Its membership comprises indigenous peoples, occupied nations, minorities and independent states or territories, and all members are governed by the UNPO Covenant.

developments at the international level, MASSOB has taken its campaign to the UN demanding that the world body compel Nigeria to pay a whopping amount of 1 (One) trillion dollars as war compensation to the Igbo nation. This payment, according to the movement, is intended to serve as compensation for the destruction wrecked by the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, the money, property and goods of Igbo people destroyed or stolen before, during and after the civil war in 1970 (*Vanguard* 28. 5. 2001).

### **6.3.3. *Igbo Diaspora and Political Activism***

Owing to the structure of the global system, most diaspora groups have been seen to be endemic to the international system, and possessing the capacity for independent and assertive political action at the same time (Shain 2002: 116). In dealing with the 'Igbo Question' in the Nigerian state, Igbo diaspora groups in many ways constitute the carriers of Igbo narratives and attempt to promote views that are supportive of Igbo identity and interests, which invariably challenges, counters and opposes official views of the Nigerian state. Recent interpretations on the 'Igbo Question' in Nigeria have constantly thrown up the notion of 'genocide', a tendency which captures the legacy of Biafra and the Nigerian-Biafra War for the Igbo in diaspora.<sup>40</sup> Some of these diaspora groups see themselves as embodying the experience of calamity, suffering, dispossession and loss which resulted from the war. While they increasingly invoke the sceptre of genocide, they also perceive themselves as standard bearers for the actualisation of the Igbo quest for self-determination.

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<sup>40</sup> This is aptly captured in most papers presented at the Biafra-Nigeria Civil War Conference, Marquette University, 25-26 September, 2009.

The long-drawn economic crisis and the 'perceived' claim of marginalisation by the Igbo ethnic extraction in Nigeria contributed to the massive migration of the Igbo population to North America and Europe, considerably weakening the legitimacy and capacity of the Nigerian state to speak for its people. Internally, a series of regime policies initiated the process that led to the emergence of MASSOB and other radical ethno-nationalist groups which emerged after 1999 demanding different forms of self-determination rights. The support of the Igbo diaspora for MASSOB's self-determination efforts has strengthened the propaganda platform of the movement and influenced its recognition among different international players. However, the ambiguity inherent in some of the efforts of diaspora Igbo groups is that diasporic members tend to support the activities of MASSOB from a distance, and do not have to live with the realities of incessant harassments and clashes with State Secret Service (SSS) operatives and the Nigerian Police Force, and the detentions and imprisonments associated with such struggles on the home front. This raises critical questions in the politics of supporting 'legitimate or illegitimate' struggles for self-determination and nationalist aspirations within a group.

Considering the radical nature of its demands and the overtly repressive stance of the Nigerian government towards the movement, MASSOB was inadvertently granted international and local exposure by the Nigerian government which has attracted the international community, interested parties and the United Nations. As such, several calls have denounced government abuses and killing of members of the movement, demanding that the Nigerian government should engage the movement in negotiation

(Adekson 2004: 91). The Igbo diaspora, comprising a transnational network of Igbo groups and individuals have become critical constituencies for the articulation of the Igbo 'homeland' position in the international community. Host states of Nigerian diaspora groups in North America and Europe sometimes take into account the interests and political activism of these diaspora groups in formulating policies towards Nigeria. In 1997, four years after the June 12 Elections were annulled by the Nigeria's military regime which ushered in a period of human rights abuses, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial executions, restrictions on free expression, association and the emasculation of the Nigerian judicial system through decrees and the use of military tribunals, and unprecedented repression under the regime of General Sani Abacha, prominent Nigerian groups and Nigerians in diaspora pushed for the introduction of the 'Nigeria Democracy Act' in the United States House of Representatives.<sup>41</sup>

However, a critical element in Igbo diaspora political activism, particularly, with reference to Igbo diaspora groups in the United States, centres on issues of democratisation and human rights for the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. The reasons for this stance are not far-fetched. First, most diaspora groups in the United States have imbibed America's cosmopolitan disposition and progressive social values which they sometimes try to project into their homeland conflict. Second, available evidence suggest that the United States has the largest concentration of Igbo academics in the diaspora (Reynolds 2002). The membership of these groups is most times dominated by these individuals who tend to be less radical or confrontational, but more engaging in

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<sup>41</sup> See full details at [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent\\_Action/dc\\_61297.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent_Action/dc_61297.html).



the quest for self-determination. As the Nigeria state struggles with different crisis of state legitimacy and political dissent, the location of Igbo diaspora groups sometimes avail them the political space to lobby against the repressive Nigerian state, and based on the twin reasons alluded to above, diaspora Igbo groups tend to favour approaches tacitly sanctioned by the United States Government.

The official United States Administration policy is the promotion of democracy worldwide and this has been one of the core issues in Obama's African policy. According to the 2009 United States 'Human Rights Report on Nigeria', issues bordering on 'arbitrary arrest and prolonged pre-trial detention' which constitute part of the allegations levelled by MASSOB against the Nigerian state have been rife in Nigeria in recent times (US Department of State '2009 Human Rights Report: Nigeria'). Since the early 2000s Igbo diaspora groups, like *Igbo Coalition in the Americas* and *Ekwe Nche Organization*, which comprises mainly of Igbo academics and professional in different fields have organised series of 'Biafran Genocide Conventions', 'Biafra-Nigeria Civil War Conferences', protest marches and symposia in different cities in the United States.<sup>42</sup>

The last International Conference of the Igbo Studies Association, held in Howard University, Washington, DC, which attracted eminent Igbo academics, business moguls, media practioners and politicians from North America, Europe and Africa. The gathering which focused mainly on the Nigeria state and the Igbo ethnic group after fifty years of independence, addressed issues of peace and security in the Igbo homeland and how

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<sup>42</sup> Private communication with Rev. Columba Nnorom of the Igbo Coalition in the Americas and *Ekwe Nche Organization* on April 9 2010, Howard University, Washington, DC.

the current situation of insecurity negatively impacts Igbo social and economic development. While agreeing that the Igbo still remains at the margins of social and political life in Nigeria, the conferees called for the need to urgently reposition the Igbo in national politics in Nigeria, and not necessarily for a disengagement from the Nigerian state.<sup>43</sup> The utilisation, organisation and mobilisation of different political structures and diplomatic influence by these groups to shape United States perception on events in Nigeria is not unconnected to an abiding respect for constitutional and democratic processes which the United States can identify with.

#### **6.4. Diaspora, Globalisation and Self-Determination**

The movement of people (voluntary and involuntarily) is a central force in the contemporary global system. The increased processes of globalisation and the relative ease associated with the movement of people and ideas have enhanced transnational links and diasporic configurations. As Bercovitch (2007: 19) points out, 'the processes of globalisation have, among other things, led to the emergence of de-territorialized ethnicities'. This buttresses the views of Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1994: 7), that 'ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality (however large) has now become a global force, forever slipping in and through the cracks between states and diasporas'. Apart from enhancing the opportunities for diaspora configuration, globalisation influences the potential impact of diaspora groups on their homeland conflict through changes in technology and communication, and establishes

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<sup>43</sup> See the conference Communiqué of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Igbo Studies Association Conference, Howard University, Washington, DC, 9-10 April, 2010: <http://igbostudiesassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/ISA-2010-COMMUNIQUE.pdf>.

and sustains these links with the homeland. Based on 'new' opportunities provided by globalisation, diaspora communities have latched on to instant access to communication driven by technological revolution to expedite the evolution of what Bercovitch (2007: 20) refers to as new forms of 'imagined community. In various ways, these tendencies contest the socio-spatial or territorial assumptions of community and politics by surpassing physical space, spanning transnational borders and integrating members on the basis of ethno-national affiliations, with an inherent capacity to produce, appease or aggravate a conflict (Bercovitch 2007: 20).

As Bercovitch (2007: 20) points out, globalisation aids the reach and control of diaspora political activity in different ways. The first relates to the improvements in communications, transport and finance which enable diaspora communities to act globally without external or internal inhibitions. Global ties are maintained and enhanced through publications, websites, blogs and internet chat groups. Secondly, globalising forces enable diaspora communities to retain ties with homeland politics. The ability to follow these conflicts on the television and internet brings the conflict closer to diaspora communities. Thirdly, this can sum up into generating genuine external impetus for homeland ethnic nationalism, mobilisation and secession. While the involvement of migrants, exiles and other diaspora groups in homeland politics is not novel development in itself, the tempo and scope of recent globalisation processes have ensured that the site of political, social and economic developments are increasingly extraneous to the ambit or sovereignty of the nation-state. Sassen (1997: 29) contends that though 'sovereignty remains a feature of the system ... it is now

located in a multiplicity of institutional arenas', and that this 'reconfiguration of space may signal a more fundamental transformation in the matter of sovereignty'. Among other things, this enhances open access to freedom of information for hitherto suppressed ethnic groups, and an avenue to leverage on freedom of assembly, information and expression, and pressuring their home state to effect favourable domestic policies toward their homeland.

The dispersed location of diaspora communities and their networks allow for different configurations, actors and agenda. One of the most potent means adopted by the Igbo diaspora community in its relations with homeland politics is the use of 'computer mediated communication (CMC)', which includes the use of e-mails, the world-wide-web, internet newsgroups, blogs and other sites dedicated to such purposes. This has been the major means through which the Igbo diaspora community conscientizes, informs, educates and maintains contacts with the Igbo population at home and others in diaspora, and in most cases, organise political opposition activities. These sites are sometimes used to portray videos and pictures of perceived Igbo discrimination and marginalisation in Nigeria. Deeply steeped in opposing political views, these sites show pictures and videos that can be classified into three categories. The first portray video clips and pictures of starving Biafra children during the Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970) which is interspersed with historical images typically portraying events such as the massacre of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria and during the civil war. The second captures a mixture of footage from current and persistent cases of Igbo marginalisation in Nigeria, the killing of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria through different Shari'a edicts and through

incessant religious disturbances. Thirdly, and most often than not, these sites portray the history and culture of the Igbo, and link the Igbo to its ancient past and civilisations which transcend the creation of the Nigerian state. This also highlights the achievements of great Igbo minds who have contributed to shaping the Igbo nation.<sup>44</sup>

## 6.5. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis demonstrates the ability of a diaspora community to impact homeland politics, both in formal and in informal ways. This brings new actors, processes and developments to the fore which challenges our long-held views or accepted notions of sovereignty, political authority and cultural belonging. Although, the strands of information and factual evidence assembled on the Igbo diaspora may not be overarching in its scope and entirety, the chapter has weaved together specific historical, social and economic contexts under which the Igbo diaspora emerged, particularly, in the United States. The main thesis outlined here has been that the legacy of Biafra as an 'imagined homeland' and the trauma of the Nigerian-Biafran War which is largely perceived as a war of Igbo national liberation have determined the nature and direction of Igbo diasporic involvement in homeland conflicts. Another crucial

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<sup>44</sup> Some of these websites include: Biafra Foundation (BF), [http://www.biafraland.com/new\\_year\\_message\\_2004.htm](http://www.biafraland.com/new_year_message_2004.htm); The Chinua Achebe Foundation, [http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com/chinua\\_achebe/2005nov28-chinua-achebe-foundation-col-joe-achuzia.html](http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com/chinua_achebe/2005nov28-chinua-achebe-foundation-col-joe-achuzia.html); Kwenu.com, [http://www.kwenu.com/biafra/massob/aba\\_declaration.htm](http://www.kwenu.com/biafra/massob/aba_declaration.htm); Biafra/Centre for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS) <http://www.biafra.cwis.org/pdf/REPORT%20ON%20ELECTION.pdf>; Biafra Nation, [www.biafraland.com](http://www.biafraland.com); The Biafra Network, [www.biafranet.com](http://www.biafranet.com); Biafra Nigerian World (BNW), <http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com>; Umuigbo USA, [www.umuigbousa.org](http://www.umuigbousa.org); Ekwe Nche Research Institute, <http://ekwenche.org>; MASSOB News, <http://massobnews.com/2009/08/08/nigeria-obi-betrayed-massob-says-uwazurike>; Biafra Forum, <http://biafraforum.biafranet.com>; Biafra National Union, <http://www.bianu.net>; Igbo Forum, <http://igboforum.igbonet.com>; WaZoBia+, <http://wazobia.biafranigeria.com> (All accessed at different times between 2009 and 2010).

observation relates to the remarkable and uncharacteristic attachment of the Igbo diaspora to their homeland, and the development of viable hometown union structures, whether as internal, regional or as Atlantic diaspora groups, which is relatively unusual when compared to some ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The leadership of the diaspora Igbo community may not be unitary owing to the tendency to sometimes contest what is in the interest of the Igbo among these groups.<sup>45</sup> However, the Nigerian-Biafran War has remained a watershed in Igbo history which also serves as a catalyst to forge a united Igbo group identity. This resonates broadly among the Igbo diaspora which has become an international diaspora dispersed throughout all continents of the world with the United States being home to the majority. With the increased communication attendant to the globalisation processes, the interaction between the Igbo diaspora and the Igbo in Nigeria is set to intensify. The historical and social context in which this interaction and inter-penetration takes place will remain critical, as it may alter the speed at which global and cultural flows are transmitted and exchanged, with obvious consequences for political struggle in homeland politics.

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<sup>45</sup> A case in point is the declaration of the Biafran Government in Exile (BGIE). Based on a personal communication with Rev. Fr. Columba Nnorom, it was gathered that the move was ill-informed and the entire pro-Biafra diaspora groups were not carried along in the plan.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation marks a departure in the study on ethno-nationalist self-determination in Nigeria which has largely been associated with minority ethnic groups of the Nigeria's Niger Delta region or with the Yoruba Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) prior to the decline in its activities. Based on details amassed through secondary sources, interviews and observations, the major objective of this dissertation was to explore the resurgence of Igbo/MASSOB agenda for self-determination within the context of the tensions between different ethnic groups in the Nigerian state. Specifically, the quest has been framed in terms of a tri-polar ethnic struggle among the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo). MASSOB's quest for self-determination by means of outright secession into an alternative political and administrative arrangement and the stance of the Nigerian state connects to broader issues of violence, state legitimacy, national question and citizenship, and what all these mean for the nation-state project in Africa.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

This dissertation proceeds from a methodological framework that covers conceptual/theoretical, historical and analytical issues in contemporary Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. As such, an attempt has been made to account for the conceptual foundations, challenges, limitations, and an elaboration of the disparate and evolving understandings of 'self-determination' as a concept. The exploration of the concept in the second chapter demonstrates that the ambiguity and inconsistency associated with the term stems from its diverse understandings in international law, political philosophy

and actual power politics. As a concept rooted in international law and power politics, MASSOB has linked up its agenda with these global discourses on human rights and social justice to empower local claims in Nigeria, and to achieve the rhetorical and practical goals of politics.

The third chapter deconstructs Igbo identity by examining their society and delving into their pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history. From an agglomeration of disparate communities and clans in the pre-colonial era, this chapter showed how the process of 'becoming' Igbo evolved under specific patterns of relationship during the colonial period. With the emergence of party politics, ethno-regional organisations and nationalist politics during the colonial era, this tendency was further aggravated by the power tussle with other ethnic groups, and ultimately, it engendered the emergence of 'political' Igbo nationalism, and the need to fight to protect the Igbo identity in the first decade of Nigeria's independence.

By profiling the Igbo experience in contemporary Nigeria, chapter four presented evidence to show that between the end of the civil war in 1970 and the late 1990s when MASSOB emerged and revived the ghost of Biafran/Igbo secession, the Igbo did not have any visible or confrontational organisation. Against this backdrop, the chapter engages the events that led to the origins of MASSOB, the objectives, membership, structure and tactics, and key activities of the movement; its attempt to undertake parallel structures of governance in Igbo land and the encounters and clashes between MASSOB and the Nigerian state. As it appears, the advent of MASSOB unleashed



different tendencies (both revolutionary and reactionary) and these tendencies have been pushing for different agenda in the quest to address the 'Igbo Question' in contemporary Nigeria.

The fifth chapter explains how emergent forms of Igbo nationalism borrow from a narrative that draws on memories of persecution, deprivation and marginalisation which have become part of the dominant Igbo narrative since the end of the civil war. Although, largely composed of Igbo youths below the age of forty (with a few young Igbo adults who are above forty or middle aged), most of whom did not experience the war but were born after the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War in 1970, this chapter shows how the membership of MASSOB forge a connection between the present and the past, a past which most of them were not necessarily a part of, but are bound to, through 'collective memory'. Among other things, the chapter demonstrates how MASSOB has connected with the history of the war and tapped into a narrative that has effectively linked the present and the past in the struggle for Igbo self-determination.

Since diaspora groups of Ogoni and Igbo ethnic extractions in Nigeria have played an active role in their homeland conflict, diaspora activism and politics is not unique to the Igbo diaspora. But as chapter six shows, the impact of the Igbo diaspora on contemporary political developments in Nigeria and on homeland politics have become increasingly important. Hence, the emphasis in chapter six was to clarify the waves of Igbo diaspora and the activities of the three levels of Igbo diasporic communities with a view to understanding their social, cultural and economic influences, and how these are deployed from their base to promote the concerns and interests of the Igbo homeland.

## **Deductions and Analysis of Findings**

Taken together, this dissertation has highlighted and articulated, through the case of MASSOB the complex social and political crisis occurring within the Nigerian nation-state project, and the fact that the Nigerian public space is also a site for negotiation, conflict, domination, opposition, struggle, resistance and compromise. Hence, this points to the emergence of different forms of crisis with several implications for the Nigerian state:

- (i) The first is the proliferation of self-determination groups from different sections of the country making different claims on the Nigerian state within the expanded democratic space;
- (ii) Second is the contentions characterized by MASSOB's 'claims' and 'counter-claims' of security, territoriality and sovereignty as they are enacted in the southeast of the country;
- (iii) The third is the structural limitations and contradictions inherent in the present Igbo nationalism signaled by competing and contesting agenda;
- (iv) Finally, the repressive response of the Nigerian security operatives raises issues for concern.

What this dissertation has shown is that the reinvention of the Igbo nationalist project sometimes lacks clarity, and it is often imbued with contradictory and normative ideals. But given the rhetoric and actions of MASSOB which are couched in self-determination, sovereignty and the establishment of an independent state of 'Biafra', the crisis is likely

to intensify, and lead a 'violent order', contestations over sovereignty and security, and issues of human security in Southeastern Nigeria. However, the position of this dissertation is that if a meaningful future is to be guaranteed for the Nigerian project in the twenty first century, the Nigerian state must establish an enduring and cohesive basis for a democratic federal nation-state. This dissertation shows that, although the emergence of MASSOB and other ethno-nationalist movements in Nigeria since 1999 can be located within the context of a more assertive moment of ethnic nationalism, both in continental and global terms, they also reflect a more fundamental quest for a shift in the trajectory of nation-building. This shift marks the end of state-managed appeasement processes that offer little or no radical change, but is geared towards transforming and structuring power relationships which are broader in scope and context-specific, and which at a minimum, takes in cognisance the quest by its constituent ethnic units for self-determination. This dissertation shows that the response of the Nigerian state is a far less adequate response to the challenges posed by self-determination nationalism.

### **Suggestions for Addition Research**

Given the global template on which ethnic nationalism and the quest for self-determination has thrived in the last two decades, and its general impact on Africa and Nigeria, it is fruitful to engage in an analyses of the causes and consequences of, and responses to, various forms of ethno-nationalist uprisings. These may be some of the possible areas of research:

- What is the role of the state in global justice?
- How do global discourses on self-determination and social justice play out in specific national contexts?
- What are the dynamics, constraints and possibilities inherent in the mobilization of these rights and laws and what are the potentials inherent them for emancipation?
- Are processes of ethnic nationalism in multi-ethnic countries similar to Nigeria the same in their origin, evolution and occurrence?
- Are there states where constructive policies have successfully and non-violently moderated instances of ethnic nationalism in their domains?
- If so, how were the successes achieved and where lies the lesson for Nigeria?
- Which factors are more important in accounting for ethno-nationalist movements? Internal group characteristics or external realities or development?
- Are there reasons why ethno-nationalist groups which exist in the same state adopt different approaches or react differently to the state in the quest for self-determination?

It is hoped that future research projects in these and other related areas would improve our understanding of the origins, dynamics, contours and consequences of ethno-nationalist claims for self-determination globally and locally.

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#### ***Newspapers and Magazines***

*The News, Tempo, Dawn, Vanguard, Sunday Champion, Saturday Champion, Daily Sun, Guardian, Daily Champion, Thisday, Post Express, PM News, Tell Magazine, Sunday Punch.*

#### ***Selected Interviews***

- Private communication with Morris Ogwu, Area Administrator of MASSOB, Lagos, 15 December, 2009.
- Chief Goddy Uwazuruike, Vice-President, *Aka Ikenga* (Igbo Think Tank)
- Chief Benjamin Onuegbu, Western Representative, *Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)*.
- Emmanuel Onyeme, Area Administrator, *MASSOB*
- Morris Ogwu, Area Administrator, *MASSOB*
- Pius Maduagwu, Area Administrator, *MASSOB*
- Chuks, *MASSOB* Member
- Anonymous members of *MASSOB* and some Igbo youths.



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- WaZoBia+, <http://wazobia.biafranigeria.com>.