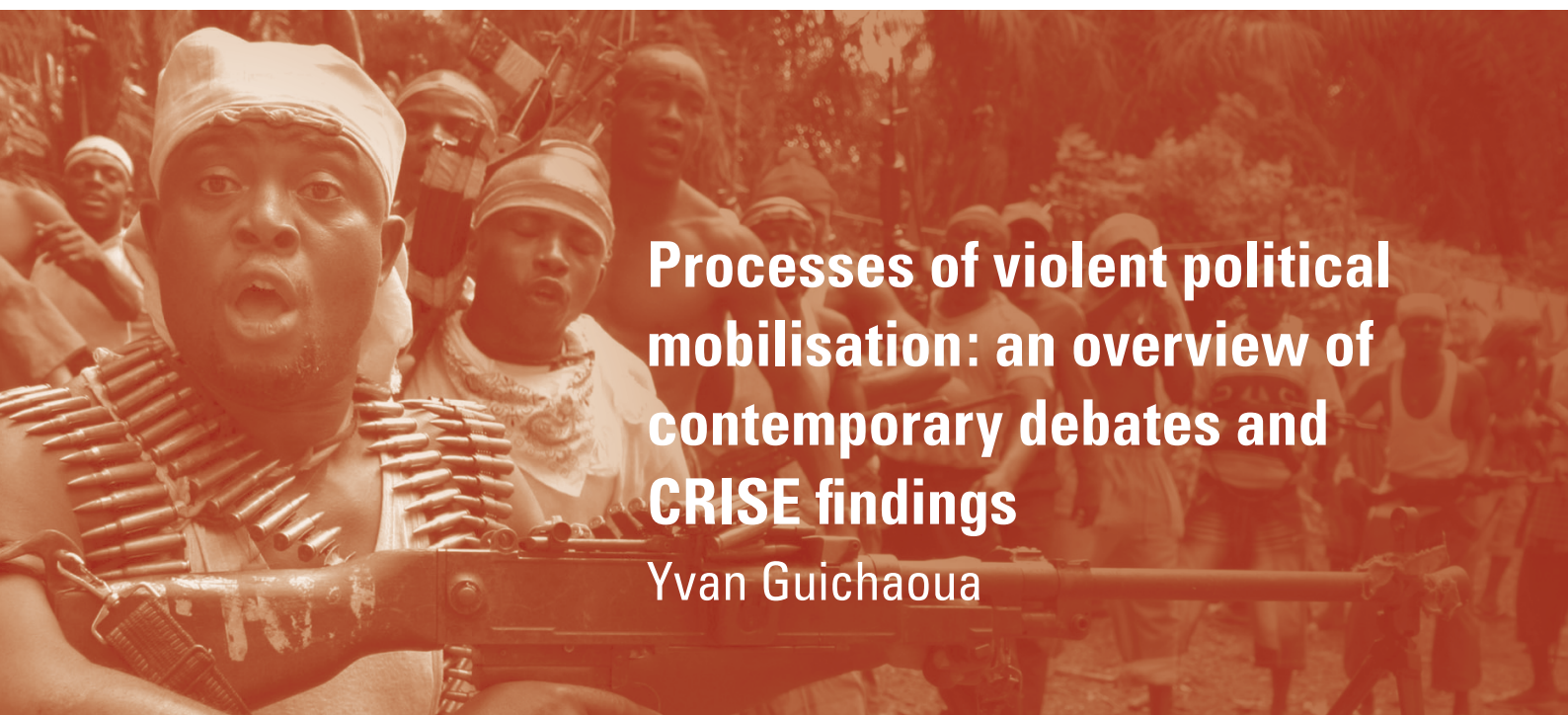# CRISE:

Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity

Processes of violent political mobilisation: an overview of contemporary debates and CRISE findings
Yvan Guichaoua

OVERVIEW

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Table of Contents

Glossary

Achamor	An unemployed Tuareg youth (singular of *ishumar*)
Forces Armées Nigeriennes (FAN)	Niger armed forces
Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara (FARS)	Tubu militia in Niger
Forces Nationales d'Intervention et de Sécurité (FNIS)	Niger military body intended to monitor desert areas
Front de Liberation de l'Aïr et de l'Azawak (FLAA)	Niger rebel group active in the 1990s
Front Patriotique Nigérien (FPN)	Niger rebel group which splintered from the MNJ in 2009
Front des Forces de Redressement (FFR)	Niger rebel group which splintered from the MNJ in 2008established by Rhissa ag Boula
Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC)	Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group in Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
Ishumar	Unemployed Tuareg youths
Jeunesses Arabes	Arab militia in Niger, active in the 2000s
Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola - Partido do Trabalho (MPLA)	The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola – Party of Labour
Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ)	Short-lived rebel group in Niger, founded in 2007
O'odua People's Congress (OPC)	Ethnic militia in Nigeria
Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO)	The Mozambican National Resistance
Revolutionary United Front (RUF)	Sierra Leonean militant group
teshumara	lifestyle of exiled Tuaregs, by extension Tuareg nationalist ideology
União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA)	The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

Executive summary

This paper reviews the recent literature on processes of violent mobilisation. It highlights the need to distinguish between conflict and violence, arguing that violence deserves specific attention, separate from an analysis of the macro-cleavages which lead to social conflict. It goes on to detail those circumstances which result in political violence. Political violence is generally initiated by 'specialists', people with the specific skills and desire to trigger such conflict, and we analyse what makes non-specialists follow them. We question the validity of a dichotomy between greed and grievances as drivers of violent engagement. Instead we show that participation in violence could be seen, from an individual perspective, as a constantly changing process of 'navigation'. However, this makes establishing motivations for violence difficult, both analytically and empirically. We therefore suggest an alternative way of studying the causes of the worst forms of collective violence, shifting attention from the individual to armed organisations. Indeed, these armed organisations are where the external constraints on insurgency (logistical, political, military) and the internal imperatives of military cohesion and efficiency are dealt with. The forms of collective violence (of high intensity or not, targeted or indiscriminate etc.) stem from how such organisational puzzles are solved. We detail some of the causal mechanisms that could be significant in shaping the histories and routes taken by such armed organisations. The last section discusses the policy implications of these findings.

1

Introduction: disentangling conflict and violence

Even where violence is clearly rooted in pre-existing conflict, it should not be treated as a natural, self-explanatory outgrowth of such conflict, something that occurs automatically when the conflict reaches a certain intensity, a certain temperature. Violence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics. (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998, p. 426)

One frequent pitfall when dealing with political violence is to equate it with conflict. While political violence does generally signal the existence of a pre-existing conflict, most conflicts do not result in violence. Statistically, political violence remains a rare and localised phenomenon. Why it happens deserves attention in its own right, as well as specific analytical tools. One should not conceive of political violence as a higher degree of conflict, but as a process following its own logic, whose episodes and bifurcations are largely endogenous. The root causes of conflict such as horizontal inequalities (HIs, as detailed in Stewart, 2008) or the collapse of the state following decades of neo-patrimonial rule (Bates, 2008) may certainly raise the risk of political violence, but they do not fully *explain* it. One very obvious reason for this is that violence not only requires specific weapons; more importantly, it requires specific individual skills and inclinations; specific organisational skills; and – one might argue – a specific political culture where shared norms make the use of force a viable option. In contrast, non-violent protesters and rebels are likely to be heterogeneous, with very varied personal histories, and to become active for different reasons.

To illustrate the specific 'skills' conducive to violence, we need only look at the decisive role played by veterans or ex-combatants in igniting political violence. For example, the Islamist forces of the Algerian Civil War were organised around a core of combatants who had previously fought the Russians in Afghanistan. In Côte d'Ivoire, General Gueï's coup d'état of 1999 followed hard on the heels of a mutiny involving military units who had been posted to the Central African Republic, and Gueï's coup in turn led to the failed coup of 2002 and subsequent civil war. And the initiators of the 2007 Tuareg rebellion in Niger all had a military background. Indeed, a recent statistical analysis has suggested that partition violence in India after World War II may well have been greater in districts where veterans had been on the frontline for prolonged periods during the war (Jha and Wilkinson, 2010). Political violence may also erupt more easily in environments where violent individuals are commonplace, such as gangsters in crime-ridden areas. The use of 'area boys' by politicians during Nigerian elections or the involvement of organised crime during the transition era in South Africa are illustrations of this (Kynoch, 2005).

Political violence is generally carried out by specialists and one thus needs to know who these specialists are and why they behave as they do. In so doing, we move away from a paradigm that sees political violence as a continuation by other means of non-violent contentious politics and which provides a single explanatory framework for highly diverse manifestations of collective dissent. We believe that empirically political violence is sufficiently distinctive to make it a separate field of study.[1]

Those who advocate of the use of force, for whatever reasons, may be joined by those who have yet to become specialists in violence. The factors that drive new recruits to enlist are not necessarily the same as those which drive their leaders. Sierra Leone is a typical case,

1   We do not go as far as Kalyvas (1999) to whom 'civil war violence should be distinguished from violent collective action (such as riots and pogroms) because war structures choices and selects actors in fundamentally different ways than peace – even violent peace' (p. 245). This paper will touch on riots and communal violence as, in the case studies presented, there does not appear to be a neat, clear boundary between the states of peace and war. In many situations, coercive powers are ambiguously distributed between state and non-state actors, resulting in 'neither war nor peace' forms of social order, conducive to sudden outbursts of collective violence, as illustrated by the highly inflammable Nigerian Middle Belt.

where very few of the low-level combatants in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) expressed an interest in the putative diamond bonanza, unlike their commanders (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). We therefore also need to consider the conditions in which followers participate in armed violence.[2] Moreover, once combatants have joined they are likely to live through radically new experiences that help to change their attitudes; the way they make decisions; their opportunities; and the people with whom they interact (Wood, 2008). The reasons why they chose to remain, or to leave, are generally different from those which made them join in the first place. One then needs to enter the vast debate on the agency of combatants. Here again, we see huge diversity (including within the same conflict), ranging from willing, dedicated 'rebels with a cause' to forcibly abducted children. This diversity of combatant profiles needs to be understood. Incidentally some widely held views need to be challenged concerning the role played by women and children in collective violence. The concept of 'child soldiers' does not seem particularly helpful, while considering women only as the victims of conflict is simply wrong, as will be shown later.

Individuals involved in violence often share characteristics with the organisations in which they have enlisted. In fact the profiles of fighters can be seen to stem, at least in part, from the organisational traits of the outfit to which they belong. Rebellions or militias are wrongly portrayed as welcoming anyone and everyone to their ranks. In practice, they have specific qualitative and quantitative human resources needs, which force them to establish tentative recruitment strategies with varying degrees of success. These strategies are likely to be highly volatile and constantly under revision, as the histories of such armed organisations are influenced by many factors, both internal (including troop morale and leadership divisions) and external (such as the attitude of government and their relationships with civilians). As a result, the fighters' observable traits should be seen as the outcome of a temporary and mutable match between their leaders' recruitment policies, organisational constraints and individual expectations.

An alternative path towards understanding violence in times of civil war, and which disconnects the motivations of combatants from the 'master narrative' of the conflict, has proved fruitful. While analyses of participation generally insist on 'pull' factors as perceived by combatants, here 'push' factors are central. Violence, it is argued, either results from non-combatants' using the presence of military forces on their territory to settle personal scores by providing intelligence to the occupying authority; or it results from occupying forces trying to coerce civilians to collaborate (Kalyvas, 2006). What is key in this model is the distribution of territorial control between the warring parties. One may relate this literature to other contextual explanations of violence. For example extreme political tension and deeply held feelings of insecurity may unleash large scale collective violence. As shown by Straus (2006) and A. Guichaoua (2010), the 1994 Rwandan genocide can only be understood in the context of the war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front and the Rwandan Armed Forces that had started four years earlier. An important lesson from this literature is that processes of political radicalisation and violence are often endogenous to violent conflict. What early cross-country statistical analyses of conflicts have overlooked is that the magnitude of violence can only be understood dynamically and cannot be inferred from pre-conflict conditions.

Carefully collected micro-level data is needed in order to address these issues. Such evidence has only started to be gathered systematically in recent years. CRISE has contributed to this process. In parallel with the conceptualisation and the measurement of the role HIs play in precipitating violent conflicts, CRISE has explored the micro-foundations of political violence, with substantial research in both Nigeria and Niger. The first investigates an ethnic militia – the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) – and the second, a short-lived rebel group – the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ). The results of this work have been discussed and contrasted with observations from elsewhere.[3] Most of our work on the perpetrators of violence addresses *organised* violence, as well as some consideration of more or less spontaneous violent outbursts such as riots. The perpetrators of violence interviewed in Niger and Nigeria were long-term members of groups whose goals were prima-

2   However self-evident it might sound today, the validity of such a statement has only recently gained credence within the development community. The early models that dominated analysis of civil wars and development were grounded on very simplistic assumptions regarding the interaction between leaders and followers, albeit sponsored by prestigious institutions such as the World Bank (see Collier and Hoeffler, 1998 or Collier, 2000).

3   At a workshop held in Oxford in March 2009, to which prominent specialists in the field were invited. The papers presented were all based on fresh data and used innovative research methods. See *www.crise.ox.ac.uk/ mobilisation.shtml.*

rily the perpetration of violence against government security forces; however, they also participated in episodes of communal violence, as our Nigerian case study shows.[4]

It is important to bear in mind that the reflections presented here are not formulated as an alternative to macro-level approaches, but rather complement them. This paper does not aim to analyse the nature of conflicts' 'master cleavages'. The broader political economy will only be mentioned as the backdrop against which violence emerges, or insofar as it affects individual behaviours. Our aim is to explain the behaviour of those who challenge the incumbent authorities, or who show aggression towards neighbouring communities, by adopting a 'bottom up' approach. However, we also consider the responsibilities that state actors hold in making policy (e.g. distributional) choices likely to buttress armed insurgency. Focusing essentially on the challengers to the state will not prevent us from considering the role that state actors play in provoking 'moral outrage' among civilians; or in weakening or (unintentionally) strengthening rebel movements, notably when adopting certain counter-insurgency tactics.

Section 2 focuses on the role of 'entrepreneurs of violence' and the strategies they employ to gather support and foster antagonisms which lead to violence. Section III looks into alternative approaches to the violent mobilisation of followers, highlighting the many pitfalls attached to the notion of 'motivations' of perpetrators of violence. Section IV discusses the gaps which exist in our current knowledge of organised violence. Section V sets out several policy implications of our findings. Each section consists of a critical synthesis of the recent scholarly literature followed by illustrations from CRISE research, notably in Nigeria and Niger.

4 Our Nigerian work relies on a quantitative survey, which included some 170 rank-and-file fighters whose profiles, biographies and motivations were recorded. It also involved open-ended interviews with militia leaders, Nigerian scholars and officials. The more sensitive Niger research used qualitative research methods, including interviews with civil society representatives in Niamey and Agadez, and repeated discussions with combatants based outside Niger.

Entrepreneurs of violence

'After the fact, both participants and observers speak of deeply felt identities and age-old hatreds. But before and during contention, political entrepreneurs play critical parts in activating, connecting, coordinating, and representing participants in violent encounters.' (Tilly, 2003, p. 34)

'The Yoruba are no longer considered disfavoured second-class citizens but have become enemies that must be hounded into exile, haunted into detention, humiliated, dehumanised, and marked to be wiped off the surface of Nigeria […] It was then I decided to gather the youths who are quite able to flex their muscles because, if it was what is required, why not?' (Frederick Fasehun, leader of the OPC, quoted in Y. Guichaoua, 2009, p. 525)

'Activating, connecting, coordinating, and representing': these are the four activities generally undertaken by entrepreneurs of violence, as Tilly rightly identifies.[5] By providing a narrative on the society in which they live, entrepreneurs of violence typically tailor 'master cleavages' to meet individual opinion and the history of local political engagement. Their discourses help shape the boundaries between 'them' and 'us', which in turn fosters enmity. They polarise political identities and make the physical elimination of the vilified, and often dehumanised, enemy a feasible option in their followers' eyes. Radio 1000 Collines in pre-genocide Rwanda is a notorious example: a systematic attempt by extremist Hutu leaders to exacerbate hatred against the Tutsis, whom the media presented as outsiders (see Mamdani, 2001). In Radio 1000 Collines broadcasts, the Tutsis were referred to as cockroaches, deserving of extermination (Verdier, Decaux and Chrétien, 1995).

Importantly, for the discourse to be effective, it is not necessary need to stir up hatred of alleged enemies. Promises of economic or political emancipation can also help mobilise, and historically have served longer term revolutionary projects typical of the Cold War era. As highlighted by Wood (2003) among others, Liberation theology played a central role in Latin American agrarian revolts. Marxist rhetoric is still a major feature of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) ideological combatant training programme (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2004). Ironically, emancipation discourse sometimes clashes with parochial interests, as shown by Guevara's illuminating account of his activities in the Congo in the mid-1960s (Guevara, 2001).

This exemplifies another function of leaders' rhetoric: their words may be directed not so much at potential recruits as at outsiders, in order to gain financial or media support. Bob (2001) develops this perspective convincingly, showing how some well-crafted tactics to 'market' rebellions might be instrumental in gaining external attention and support, notably through international NGO networks. What is unclear, though, is what effect this discourse produces on the ground: does it curb or moderate claims; does it increase or reduce violence? One may hypothesise that enjoying international support encourages military moderation, but the causal mechanisms have yet to be undisputedly established.

Playing on peoples' subjectivity through the use of malignant 'performative repertoires' (Brass, 2006) or revolutionary liberating rhetoric is only one dimension of the role of political entrepreneurs. But political entrepreneurs actually do more than just influence people's ideas. They also take concrete initiatives: for example, 'brokerage' (connecting willing potential perpetrators of violence with each other) is arguably the most crucial job of an entrepreneur of violence. In the field of conflict analysis, unlike the study of criminal gangs (see Morselli,

5 One may also add fundraising as a highly important activity. We will consider this in greater detail below, in the section on the organizational issues faced by insurgent movements. Access to funds may only become a critical issue once the rebel movement reaches a certain size.

2009),[6] little is known about the structures of networks most conducive to large scale violent mobilisation. The form of social relations most often suggested in recent literature is political patronage: politicians simply hire thugs to spread chaos by offering them material rewards (in the form of money or tacit authorisation to loot). This view is particularly commonplace when dealing with weak democracies, where elections lack transparency and involve multifaceted, corrupt manipulation before, during and after the vote, including the coercion of voters. The widespread recruitment of 'area boys' or, more broadly, ethnic militias in Nigeria each time elections have been held since the 'democratic' transition in 1999, is a manifestation of this process (see Human Rights Watch, 2008). Brass (2006) describes similarly politically-manipulated riots in India as part of what he calls an 'institutionalized riot system', aimed at polarising communal affiliations and reaping the inherent electoral benefits. But this top-down organisation of collective violence may be only one of the many ways in which social connections (and in the case of Nigeria, quasi market-based transactions) operate in violent episodes.

Other situations seem to involve more horizontal networks, composed of friends, immediate relatives or neighbours. Comparing the profiles of Nigerian rioters and non-rioters in Kaduna and Jos, Scacco (2010) suggests that strong social connectedness at 'ward' level (the smallest urban unit in Nigeria) is a significant predictor of participation in riots. She suggests the social ties relevant to violent mobilisation are not hierarchical but highly local and horizontal: proximity networks carry information; help spread rumours and worldviews; sustain economic solidarity; and engender bonds of affection. They may also produce a bandwagon effect, especially among youths. Yet one may argue that violence only materialises in the contexts studied by Scacco because pre-existing, organised actors, specifically politically-sponsored vigilantes, use violence on a regular basis (e.g. as debt-collectors, crime fighters or business protection racketeers) and act as first movers when political tension reaches a climax. Riots could therefore result from a combination of top-down prompting by quasi-professional perpetrators of violence, and horizontal peer pressure at neighbourhood level. The OPC in Nigeria is a good example of organisational design which mixes political patronage and (horizontally) closely-connected followers at local level. 'Activating, connecting, coordinating, and representing' are all traceable activities in the movement's early days. Importantly, these activities coincide with broader historical developments, marred by undemocratic rule and repression by the Nigerian military regime.

In the remainder of this section, we will explore the various strategies employed to 'activate, connect, coordinate, and represent' that have been observed during our research in Nigeria and Niger. In the Nigerian case study, the strategy is ambitious and far-reaching, seeking massive grassroots support. In Niger, it is largely clandestine and militarily oriented, stemming from personal grudges and reliant on clan-based ties. This section concludes with a review of one crucial characteristic of such violent enterprises, namely their fragility. Violent enterprises can hardly be called unitary movements, and often result from loose, circumstantial alliances. Leaders have to navigate in highly perilous waters; they can be dethroned by rivals and see their movement unravel and irreversibly factionalise. We will illustrate this statement – from which important policy implications follow – by looking at the disintegration from within of the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ).

6 Morselli makes systematic use of the tools offered by the structural analysis of networks, which enables him to quantify precisely the impact of one individual (typically a 'broker', i.e. someone able to connect previously disconnected networks) on the criminal activity of a gang. A great strength of brokers, Morselli shows, is that their occupational status and resources are generally legal.

2.1 How the Oodua People's Congress emerged: the political patronage and social embeddedness of a grassroots movement[7]

The Oodua People's Congress (OPC), named after the mythological ancestor of the Yoruba, is one of the most prominent non-legal perpetrators of violence in Nigeria today. It is very influential in the southwest, in states demographically dominated by the Yoruba (Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, Oyo and Ondo and, to a lesser extent Edo, Kwara and Kogi). The OPC can be labelled a mass movement, as most Yoruba-dominated localities host some OPC 'zones', each composed of around 30 members. These 'zones' are accountable at the local level to OPC 'government coordinators', who in turn report to OPC 'state representatives'. The latter meet at the Lagos headquarters on a weekly basis. The militants are mostly men, from all religious backgrounds: Christians, Muslims and followers of the traditional religions. Whether these militants are card-carrying members who regularly attend meetings, or merely sympathisers who occasionally contribute to OPC activities, is difficult to quantify; as is the proportion of 'esos' (or 'guardians', the alleged paramilitary elite of the OPC) in the groups.

The OPC was founded in 1994 by Frederick Fasehun, a wealthy medical doctor and business-man, now in his 70s. Although the OPC rapidly gained popular success, taking on a complex collective dimension, the movement's early days were shaped by Fasehun's political beliefs, aims and, most importantly, his social connections. Fasehun started out as a representative of the labour movement before becoming a human rights activist. Only late in his career did he become an ethnic entrepreneur, following the 1993 presidential election in which Moshood Abiola, a rich Muslim Yoruba, was denied victory. The election was followed by a massive repression of pro-democracy movements.

The OPC managed to translate deep political grievances into massive political mobilisation. Those grievances followed frustrated promises of democratic transition and fierce repression of political opposition under the most highly corrupt post-independence military regime Nigeria had ever known. In response to this situation, Fasehun made three moves. The first was to adopt and spread an ethnic reading of the political situation, popularising the discourse of 'resentment' commonly observed in circumstances of growing interethnic tensions (Petersen, 2002). The second was to encourage the OPC to resort to force. The third, and most critical for the success of the movement, was to seek the support of prominent Yoruba figures from civil society and the labour movement; the OPC also gained the backing of the older, socially-established leaders of Yoruba political factions, and the prestige of supportive secret societies. The OPC cannot therefore be said to be exclusively Fasehun's creation: it was only its appeal to existing, socially-connected sections of Yoruba society which turned it into a grassroots movement. The local dynamics behind the OPC's success will be discussed later, as part of our analysis of the 'supply side' of violence.

2.2 How personal and clan-based grudges nurture guerillas: the history of Niger's insurgent leader Rhissa ag Boula

Rhissa ag Boula was one of the most prominent figures of the rebellion in Niger in the 1990s. At the time, he built a solid reputation as a fighter among his followers. He also tenaciously and single-mindedly led the negotiations on behalf of the insurgents in Ouagadougou in 1995 (Deschamps, 2000). After the peace accords he was appointed Minister of Tourism, a position that he held for seven years and which gave him important leverage over Niger's northern region (which has a dynamic economy, almost entirely in the hands of ex-rebels: Grégoire, 2006). Indeed, controlling tourism meant controlling the ex-rebels; it also meant partially controlling all cross-border business as, outside the tourist season, transport is used for trafficking. Rhissa ag Boula certainly used his ministerial role to advance his own fortunes and to oust other Tuareg competitors. However, all this came to an end in 2003 when he was accused of masterminding a political assassination, jailed and dismissed from

7 This section is based on Y. Guichaoua (2009) and Y. Guichaoua (2010).

government. In response, his brother – also an ex-combatant – captured four regular army soldiers and held them hostage in the Aïr Mountains. They were eventually liberated and, in what looks like a deal with the authorities, Rhissa ag Boula was freed and granted amnesty. He then decided to embrace a political career, taking over an opposition party which is well-supported in and around Agadez, but without electoral success. By 2006, ag Boula's career had reached a low point, and the disgruntled Tuareg leader started travelling between France, Libya and Agadez in search of business opportunities.

Rhissa ag Boula was in Paris when the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) launched its first attacks, taking him by surprise. To add to ag Boula's bitterness, the MNJ President Aghaly Alambo had been his second-in-command during the rebellion in the 1990s, and, some suggest, his driver! As the MNJ took shape politically, ag Boula realised that this new rebellion and its leaders clearly threatened his own regional leadership, and perceived that being part of it could benefit him. In order to survive politically, ag Boula somehow needed to be associated with the insurgency; yet it would have been a disgrace for him to pledge allegiance to a former subordinate. He therefore attempted to become the rebellion's spokesman, without officially rallying to it, in the belief that his glorious past would be enough to give him credibility. He made some dramatic statements in the French press, notably against the French energy company, AREVA, which was operating a uranium mining concession in northern Niger (Mari, 2008); but ultimately he was disavowed by Alambo, who insisted that Rhissa ag Boula was not part of the MNJ. In all likelihood this infuriated ag Boula. Unable to sustain for long such an awkward position vis-à-vis the MNJ, he had soon formed his own movement, backed by a close personal ally and middle-ranking commander in the MNJ, who in turn had the support of some mountain-based combatants. This is how the Front des Forces de Redressement (FFR) was born.

There was little ideological difference between the FFR and the MNJ. Having his own rebel outfit, Ag Boula could now hope to have a say in future peace negotiations. Yet, this did not prove as straightforward as he had expected. Immediately after the creation of the FFR, the amnesty granted to Rhissa Ag Boula for the 2003 political assassination was revoked and he was actually sentenced to death. Unsurprisingly, as the Tuareg insurgency unravelled in 2009, the FFR was the most reluctant group to lay down arms; this eventually happened later in the year. In early 2010 Rhissa ag Boula was on his way to Niamey to participate in negotiations with the authorities (Habibou, 2010) when he was arrested unexpectedly by the current government, for reasons which have still to be clarified.

2.3 The uncertain tenure of insurgent leaders: Niger's short-lived, circumstantial alliances among 'social bandits'

On 9 February 2007 the military post of Iferouane, in northern Niger, was attacked by a handful of armed men driving five pick-ups. Three soldiers of the Forces Armées Nigeriennes (FAN) were killed. Two of the men who carried out the attack were known to be persistent traffickers operating in the loosely controlled desert zone between Niger, Mali, Algeria and Libya. But swiftly and unexpectedly, the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) claimed responsibility for the attack. Almost simultaneously, they broadcast a raft of substantial political claims and launched a well-targeted propaganda campaign through an internet blog, updated on a daily basis.[8] According to its founders, two of the main reasons for establishing the MNJ were the political and economic marginalisation of Niger's northern populations, and the unequal and unclear distribution of revenues from the uranium being mined in the northern town of Arlit.

Within a few months the MNJ had gathered more than 1,000 combatants, based primarily in the Aïr Mountains, and from this stronghold were capable of targeting any location within the vast northern Niger desert territory. International media coverage of the MNJ increased,

notably in the former colonial power France. In March 2008, a prominent Green Party MP invited one of the MNJ spokesmen based in France, Issouf Maha, to give a press conference at the French National Assembly. Although vague to being with, the MNJ's political discourse became noticeably more focused and consistent.

By late 2009, however, everything was over (see Figure 1 below). Militarily weakened (but not defeated), the previously united movement had split into three, while a fourth group, built around an early non-Tuareg military ally and his men, simply vanished. The three remaining groups were the Front des Forces de Redressement (FFR), the Front Patriotique Nigérien (FPN) and the original MNJ. The three groups' ideological differences are non-existent, although initial appeals for justice for all Nigériens have been blurred by what appear to be narrow sectional interests. Significantly Aghaly Alambo, MNJ President, was accused of embezzlement and stripped of the leadership by the group. In Agadez, the FPN disarmed its combatants and returned their guns, while the MNJ has done the same in Sabha, Libya. These disarmaments were made possible by Libyan intervention, and followed protracted discussions with the rebel leaders in Tripoli; Libya also facilitated the combatants' return home by offering them cash. All three groups are presently gathered in Niamey: since the coup which ousted Mamadou Tandja in February 2010, the authorities seem willing to negotiate with the rebels. In sum, what started as an obscure, isolated attack transformed into a credible, armed rebellion with a solid political agenda; but later it unravelled into a barely intelligible mosaic of seemingly disparate groups.

Our explanation for the disempowerment of the MNJ lies in its leaders' opportunistic micro-political arrangements. The two main perpetrators of the attack on the military post at Iferouane in February 2007, Amoumoune Kalakoua and Boubacar Alambo (now dead), had both previously been members of the Front de Liberation de l'Aïr et de l'Azawak (FLAA), a rebel group active in the 1990s. Although it may have been a deliberate move on their part, Neither Kalakoua nor Boubacar Alambo benefitted from the rebel integration which followed the peace agreements; nor were they included in the *réinsertion* programmes launched in 2005, which were probably too modest for their rank. The Iferouane attack can be seen as an attempt by force to include into the post-conflict integration programmes those who had not previously benefitted from Niger's peace commitments. As one of our informants, an ex-FLAA combatant, put it, the idea was to 'finish the job' under leaders who had only played supporting roles in the previous rebellion, and who had been sidelined from previous integration deals.

The frustration of those left outside the peace deals was echoed by the grievances of some ex-combatants who actually gained from the peace deals, but who suffered from what they perceive as marginalisation within their new military units, including delayed promotions and the use of derogatory language towards them. The Forces Nationales d'Intervention et de Sécurité (FNIS), a military body intended to monitor desert areas where many ex-combatants are based, saw several defections soon after the MNJ was launched.

The MNJ's founders and their early Tuareg followers seem to have been primarily motivated by the desire to obtain the financial assistance promised to them; to secure positions and promotion within the security forces, and preferably within military units made up mainly of Tuaregs; and to control of the vast northern territory and its lucrative cross-border businesses. This may also hold true for the armed non-Tuaregs who allied with the newly formed movement. These included the disgruntled general, Kindo Zada, an ethnic Djerma on the run after the kidnapping of one of his competitors in the FAN who led a troop of mercenaries active in the region (e.g. in the Central African Republic); the Jeunesses Arabes, an Arab militia suspected of cross-border trafficking; and the Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara (FARS), a Tubu militia which also fought the national armed forces in the 1990s in the far eastern part of the country. All these various groups joined the MNJ, contributing dozens of men and light arms (including AK47s, pick-ups, RPGs and landmines). Thus common military interests coalesced around the initiative of a few. To these first-movers, the MNJ

9 See *http://xrl.in/3ppp* (accessed 31 May 2010).

10 This perspective is particularly appropriate in the case of Amoumoune Kalakoua, who participated in an attack against the Malian garrison of Kidal in 2006, aiding Malian Tuaregs seeking better integration in the Malian army.

11 Two further features of 'social bandits', as outlined by Hobsbawm, may apply to our case. Hobsbawm stresses that 'social bandits' are more likely to be found in pastoralist societies. Most of the Tuareg leaders of the 2007 rebellion actually originate from the Aïr Mountains, where pastoralism is still central to the economy. Hobsbawm also highlights the popularity (mixed with fear) that 'social bandits' enjoy among the population and the grand narratives that generally describe their feats. The most detailed and, strikingly, uninterrupted account we heard during our interviews was the epic story of how Boubacar Alambo was forced to desert the army and become an outlaw. While still a soldier, he lent his gun to a friend who wished to go hunting, but the friend did not return the weapon. This would have meant severe punishment for Alambo, which is why he decided to collect the gun instead of going back to the barracks. He was then considered a deserter and was pursued by the security forces. He cunningly escaped to the mountains, taking some hostages with him, and managed to gain temporary immunity.

appeared to be the right instrument with which to extort access to security-related state revenues.

However, these alliances fell apart as quickly as they emerged: the Jeunesses Arabes spectacularly surrendered to government forces only a few months after rallying to the insurgency. The MNJ argued that they were actually sacked for private trafficking under cover of the rebellion. In early 2009, Kindo Zada disappeared after he was dismissed from the MNJ for suspicion of pro-government intelligence activities. Very recently, he rallied the FPN, the MNJ splinter group that first decided to lay down arms, through a communiqué sent from N'djamena in Chad, as a way to secure his seat at the negotiation table.[9] Certainly the biggest blow to the MNJ's cohesion was the creation, in March 2008, of a dissident Tuareg front, the Front des Forces de Redressement (FFR), whose sole purpose was to permit the return of Rhissa ag Boula to centre stage, as we have seen above.

The strong personalities and armed affiliates which make up the multiple components of the MNJ certainly do not share any automatic sense of solidarity. Their behaviour is guided by shifting instrumental loyalties, a phenomenon observed elsewhere in the region (see Debos, 2008 on Chad). These groups have heterogenous objectives and timescales and only decide to act together temporarily.[10] They share some features with Hobsbawm's 'social bandits': they are not anti-social criminals; they do indeed constitute one dimension of social order, as extra-legal actors, and might violently oppose the authorities if they feel they have been treated unjustly; they then attempt to 'right the wrongs'. They are the ones, within a community, brave enough 'to say no', although their political agenda generally does not go beyond this assertion of opposition (Hobsbawm, 2000).[11] For these reasons movements built along such lines fundamentally lack cohesiveness. One foreign intervention – embodied, in the present case, by Libya's promises of financial support – is enough to dissolve the original bonds between factions. Importantly however, this characterisation of the MNJ as a complex of outlaws does not fully account for its sociological and ideological composition, particularly at grassroots level, as we shall see below.

Figure 1: The MNJ's unstable organisational history (February 2007 – November 2010)
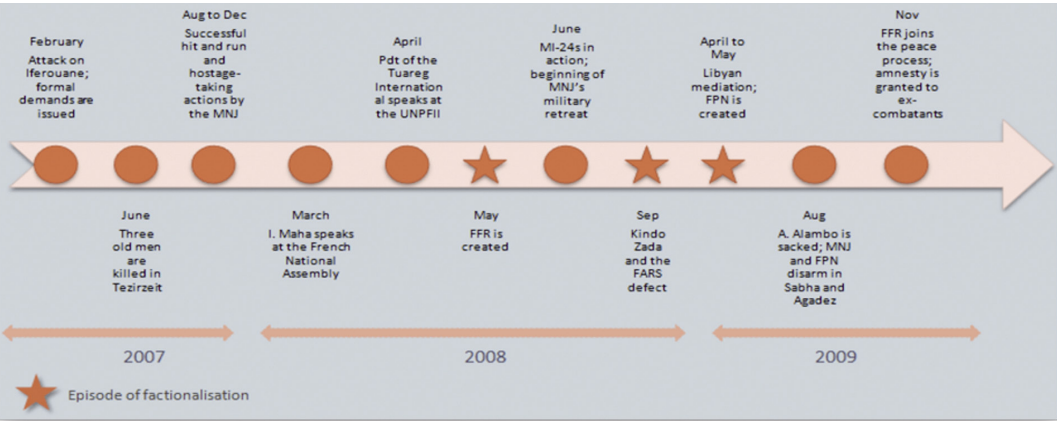
Note: UNPFII stands for United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Having looked at the instrumental role of leaders in rallying troops, we now turn our attention to their followers. As stressed above, it would be analytically incorrect and also irresponsible from a policy perspective to assume that leaders and the rank-and-file have the same motivations and share the same goals.

Participating in organised violence

3

'First movers, whom Jon Elster aptly calls "everyday Kantians," are political entrepreneurs with strong motivations, willing to assume high risks. The world does not lack Che Guevaras ready to launch insurgencies—and likely to fail. What it does lack, however, is a mass of followers willing to take the necessary risks; it is the success of entrepreneurs in recruiting followers that results in insurgencies and that calls for investigation.' (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007, p. 182)

'Ideological discourse is a fluid and contested field of meaning, amenable to a multiplicity of interpretations: one can derive multiple courses of action from the same ideological tenet. Moreover, ideology tells us very little about the variation of massacres over time and space.' (Kalyvas, 1999, p. 251)

'Joining the rebels is not a sacrifice; it's about learning; it's an adventure!' (A Tuareg combatant interviewed by Yvan Guichaoua, Niger, May 2009)

3.1 Greed versus grievances: an analytical stalemate

Today's analyses of participation in armed groups often categorise participants into two types: 'lumpen youths', lured solely by the opportunity to make a quick fortune; and 'rebels with a cause'. This categorisation, commonly called the 'greed/grievances alternative', has locked the intellectual debate on drivers of violent mobilisation by reifying a bipolar conception of insurgency, at the expense of empirical accuracy and an understanding of the intrinsically fluid nature of the phenomenon of violent engagement. The reasons why someone joins a rebel outfit differ from the reasons why they stay, and the latter are very likely to change during the course of the conflict. But before clarifying these points we will review the main findings related to the greed/grievances alternative.

The perception of rebellion primarily as a semi-criminal activity gained greater currency following those civil wars which involved the massive plunder of mining revenues and constantly shifting allegiances between protagonists, as was seen in Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Niger Delta and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Yet these wars were not just about appropriating mineral wealth. Equally, the dearth of clearly articulated ideological material from insurgents in these conflicts – or the vagueness of such material as exists – does not mean that materialist interests now reign supreme; indeed, it is typical of post-Cold War civil conflicts. Marxist rhetoric may not be part of the fighters' ideological toolkit anymore, but insurgents continue to think and act according to beliefs or specific worldviews; and these need careful analysis. Such an approach has so far only been pursued through detailed case studies, a method that yields results which are less open to generalisation and quantification than approaches focusing on the economic incentives to rebel. The 'easy to understand' nature of the greed-driven explanation (from which immediate policy recommendations can be derived) is arguably another reason for its success in the development community.

It is important to understand that, empirically, none of the above interpretations of violent engagement is actually completely wrong: reasons to engage in armed violence are highly diverse. Alternative theoretical models should not be seen as mutually exclusive. All violent groups do, in fact, reflect a very varied mixture of intertwined motives and intentions, including, among others, opportunistic and ideologically driven ones. To add to the complexity of

the researcher's task, there is a serious methodological – although relatively minor – obstacle towards the understanding of the causes of participation in political violence. Motives are not observable things; looking for what people have in mind is like chasing chimeras. Furthermore, subjective accounts gathered in post-conflict situations constitute most of the material available to researchers, and need cautious processing: they are likely to be biased by present-day strategic interests;[12] past traumatic experiences; patchy memories of events; and nebulous recollection of collective and personal memories (Wood, 2003). Yet if beliefs are not observable, behaviours are; and one must attempt to make sense of their variety by looking at the particular contexts in which they emerge. This leads us to study a third stream of drivers of participation in political violence that we broadly and somewhat roughly characterise as *push factors*.

3.2 Non-rival explanations of violent engagement

Does poverty, and, more broadly, do economic incentives trigger violent mobilisation? This hypothesis has dominated academic discourse in the past decade. It has received substantial anecdotal support from NGOs (see, e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2005), as well as from sensationalist accounts portraying the protagonists of post-Cold War civil wars as disenfranchised, egoistic 'loose molecules' (see, e.g., Kaplan, 2000). In the academic field this hypothesis was further developed by Collier and Hoeffler's seminal work; in their view, top of the rebels' agenda is their desire to appropriate the 'national cake' (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The inspiration behind this greed-based approach originates in Becker's economic modelling of crime: the bigger the prize, the smaller the opportunity cost of crime and the chance of getting caught, the higher the incentive to commit robbery (Becker, 1968). Equating political violence and criminal activities makes poverty a major driver of violent mobilisation. This rationale is seemingly congruent with Collier and Hoeffler's econometric findings that poor countries, economically dependent on primary commodities, are relatively more prone to civil conflicts. Developing these findings, other scholars have made the relationship between the onset of conflict and economic dependence on primary commodities more complex and have largely dismissed its 'greed' component (see Fearon, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Le Billon, 2007).[13] Yet, although the relationship between conflict onset and the poverty of nations remains econometrically robust, a significant cross-country correlation can obviously not be considered as a causal mechanism. Furthermore, the significance of the poverty of nations lends itself to equivocal interpretations: the variable reflects the incapacity of states to achieve development as much as the conditions of their inhabitants' economic destitution. No behavioural conclusions can thus be inferred from its significance. At best, it provides a direction for additional micro-level research. Moreover, crucially, should it be empirically proven, the observation that the poor have a greater propensity to join armed groups does not tell us if they fight out of the expectation that they will achieve material benefits, out of grievance, or out of some other confounding factor.

Several studies are now available which investigate the nexus between poverty and violence at an individual level, and their findings are equivocal. Krueger and Male ková (2003) research the profiles of suicide bombers in the Middle East and come to the conclusion that 'instead of viewing terrorism as a direct response to low opportunities or ignorance, we suggest it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of indignity and frustration that have little to do with economics' (p. 119). Suicide bombing might be perpetrated by overly dedicated combatants though, and the above findings might not apply to more ordinary combatants facing less lethal prospects. Indeed, Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) do find a significant relationship between poverty and enlistment in Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the 1990s. But their econometric analysis yields much richer results: lack of access to education; material incentives to join; pre-existing social connections within the armed factions; or the search for safety under the auspices of armed groups all are significant predictors of enlistment. The authors

therefore stress that their 'analysis suggests that different logics of participation may coexist in a single civil war' (p. 437) and conclude 'we believe that the debate now needs to shift from battles over the supremacy of particular theories to a concerted analysis of the conditions under which distinct strategies of recruitment are pursued by different groups at different times' (p. 453). We are basically in agreement with this statement and will show in the next section how helpful it might be to pursue the research path it indicates. However, recent in-depth qualitative work has uncovered mechanisms of participation in armed groups that quantitative work would find difficult to capture: firstly because large-n studies provide a very shallow picture of agents' representations; and secondly because they lack historical perspective.

Case studies classically rely on subjective testimonies, collected during repeated encounters between researchers and their respondents. They are therefore less open to the distortion and misinterpretation that typify the data coding and processing procedures of large-n surveys. Most of these detailed studies ascribe individuals' actions not so much to the objective conditions in which they live, but to the meanings actors attach to what they do; hence the need to study the way those actors perceive their environment. One may term these approaches 'culturalist' or 'interpretative' as opposed to the positivist accounts discussed above (Sewell, 2005). They have proved very useful in analysing patterns of violent engagement.

'Moral outrage', which we borrow from Wood's illuminating study of the civil war in El Salvador (Wood, 2003), may best encapsulate the mechanism of participation frequently suggested by this stream of analysis. The expression refers to the sentiments advanced by participants in insurgencies to justify their engagement. These views might be instigated by leaders through ideological training, yet numerous case studies convincingly show their practical mode of operation. Wood's account of the conflict in El Salvador demonstrates how feelings of oppression by large landowners and Liberation theology worked to entrench a deep-seated resentment among the *campesinos* who, as a result, experienced a genuine 'pleasure of agency' when joining the armed insurgency. Similarly, Marshall-Fratani (2006) and Fofana (2009) show how central the issue of citizenship was in Côte d'Ivoire's recent civil war. The authorities' rejection of the northern leader Alassane Ouattara's candidacy in the presidential elections on the basis of his 'dubious' nationality, despite his credentials as a former Prime Minister, generated massive discontent among his co-ethnics who felt downgraded to 'second-class citizens' by their own government. Grievances may take a generational tone, as shown by Lecocq (2004) in Niger and Mali and Chauveau and Richards (2008) in Sierra Leone. In these cases, the authors argue, violent mobilisation was primarily directed against a gerontocratic order which impeded youths' upward social mobility. Ironically, war is a good way to redistribute social positions and offers new economic and social perspectives to its protagonists.

As war is, by definition, a highly unstable state characterised by dramatic bifurcations, it is highly unlikely that the views and social environment of its protagonists remain unchanged. This is why interpretative approaches, far from ossifying agents' perceptions in fixed, primordialist cognitive frames,[14] generally make a serious attempt to trace and contextualise changes in actors' attitudes and behaviours. Based on a comparative study of Peru, El Salvador, Sri Lanka and Sierra Leone, Wood (2008) enumerates six social processes which transform individual histories and perceptions during wartime: nonviolent political mobilisation (which generally precedes armed conflict, e.g. mass demonstrations and strikes); military socialisation; the polarisation of social identities; the militarisation of local authority; the transformation of gender roles; and the fragmentation of the local political economy. The basic premise behind Wood's transformative processes is that those involved in war face circumstances which force them to revise their existing beliefs: they lose friends; radicalise their opinions of others; develop new social bonds; acquire warlike dispositions; and get caught up in unforeseen patterns of political, social, economic or sexual interaction. Utas (2005) provides a graphic illustration of these changes in his case study of a young

14 Not only will simplistic, culturalist approaches to conflict which naturalise identities be likely to produce biased, monocausal explanations of political violence, but they will also overdetermine it and prove incapable of predicting its timing (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

woman trying to find her way through the chaotic Liberian civil war. In addition to her idiosyncratic itinerary, Utas highlights the necessity for both fighters and civilians to 'navigate' in an environment they barely control. To do this, they must mobilise social, economic and cognitive resources, and adopt behaviours that are not only constrained by their own characters but that are also constantly reshaped by the war itself. As a consequence, the same actors can be simultaneously the victims and perpetrators of violence.[15] In the process of 'navigating' in an adverse environment violence, and especially access to arms, may well simply be one resource among others. Importantly, these observations hold true for women and so called 'child soldiers', categories of actors that are generally and unequivocally portrayed by NGOs as the victims of war. This perspective can be misleading, as both have power, albeit highly constrained and context dependant, and display the capacity to adapt during wartime (when not deliberately participating in violence: see Kampwirth, 2002).

As will be clear from the above, an analytical perspective offers poor rewards when it comes to attempting to establish what motivates perpetrators of violence. Trying to isolate and quantify motives – whether greed, deeply-felt grievances, the desire for revenge or inter-group hatreds – cannot reflect the constantly changing imperatives of actors caught up in civil war, let alone the distorting mirror of memory long after the event. Instead, as Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) suggest, one might shift the analysis away from individual subjectivities to consider the circumstances in which certain behaviour patterns appear; these behaviours could include forced recruitment; civilian massacres; looting; or, indeed, peaceful relations between non-state armed groups and the civilian population. The origins of these phenomena are often to be found in the dynamic of the conflict itself, rather than in the sociological traits and individual motives of its participants. Interestingly, two recent surveys carried out respectively in Sierra Leone and Colombia, comparing the profiles of insurgents and counter-insurgents (paramilitaries or pro-governmental militias), were not able to find any notable sociological difference between those who joined one group or the other; this would imply that what provokes violent engagement in a given territory might simply be the local strategic prominence of one armed group or another (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Arjona and Kalyvas, 2009). Similarly, entirely circumstantial factors may increase recruitment to one side of the conflict; for example, when civilians feel at risk of indiscriminate repression by the armed opposition. It might be safer to benefit as a follower from the direct protection of an armed group rather than remaining a neutral non-combatant, whatever the degree to which one sympathises with the agenda of the military group offering protection (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007).

It should be noted that recognising the role of circumstantial factors in recruitment or specific forms of violence does not eliminate the importance of understanding individuals' profiles and what motivates them to violence. Firstly, this knowledge is crucial when developing post-conflict policies, particularly the design of appropriate reintegration programmes for demobilised combatants. Secondly, even if primarily influenced by the conflict, individuals' attitudes and behaviours may affect the history and the stability of the organisations to which they belong, as can be seen in the example of the MNJ below. A current research challenge is thus to conceptualise the dynamics of the 'matching process' between would-be recruits and the organisations they join; and to identify the outcomes in terms of forms of violence or duration of conflict that such matches involve. This is discussed in the next section. But before turning to this issue, we will give a detailed account of two of the processes that might lead to participation in collective violence, drawn from CRISE research in Nigeria and Niger. The first shows how the provision by armed groups of both material and spiritual club goods may constitute a strong incentive to join. The second identifies 'moral outrage' as a source of mobilisation and stresses the learning process that violent mobilisation engenders.

15 This coincidence of victimisation and inflicting suffering on others within a group – and, more broadly, the blurring of the frontiers between 'good' and 'evil' – corresponds to what Primo Levi has called the 'gray zone' in his description of the extreme conditions of survival in Nazi concentration and extermination camps (Levi, 1988). Acknowledging the importance of such a 'gray zone' is not only important in the analysis of individual insurgents' histories, but also, from a macro perspective, in the analysis of those conditions which perpetuate oppressive social orders. The conversion of victims into perpetrators of violence may be the key factor in an armed group's capacity to sustain itself over time, as it ensures the collaboration of controlled populations at low cost. Explicit strategies to foster such forms of loyalty through terror have been witnessed in numerous violent settings. Mozambique's RENAMO (Geffray, 1990) and the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda (Blattman and Beber, 2010) have both abducted, displaced and forced civilians to kill members of their own communities as part of an initiation rite aiming at creating exclusive bonds of allegiance between them and their armed oppressors.

3.3 The club goods model: The O'odua People's Congress (OPC)'s protective moral economy

Are OPC recruits of the 'loose molecule' type, as is often portrayed by analysts of Nigeria's ethnic militias?[16] Between 2004 and 2006, we surveyed 167 grassroots militants from the militia who were living in Lagos or Ibadan. OPC followers mostly engage in two sorts of activity under the banner of the movement: they participate in cultural gatherings, and they act as vigilantes. Political matters, despite being discussed at length with other militants, do not generate any regular or substantial action. Furthermore, the average time devoted by militants to the group remains low: on average, seven hours a week. Militancy via the OPC does not entail total devotion to the cause, nor does it encompass all aspects of the militants' lives.

The OPC members surveyed were on average 31 years old. They were overwhelmingly male (90%) but our qualitative evidence suggests that women are also encouraged to undertake specific duties, being granted a role in the internal division of labour: women are prohibited from night-time operations such as vigilantism, but serve as privileged informants in the struggle against crime. Nolte (2008) also notes that women support and motivate combatants during fights, making sure that no one behaves in a cowardly fashion by ridiculing those who do not show enough courage in action.

Eight out of ten of our interviewees were Muslim. This figure is surprisingly high, as the southwest of Nigeria is predominantly Christian. It might be related to the greater tolerance shown by Yoruba Muslims towards those magical practices which are rejected outright by Christians. Incidentally, it also shows that their anti-north discourse does not follow confessional lines, since the majority of northerners share the same religion (although they belong to different brotherhoods).

Levels of education, occupation and social connectedness are the most important indicators in assessing the hypothesis that mobilisation is linked to youth disenfranchisement. Our results are unequivocal: the average educational achievement of the OPC members we surveyed was close to that measured among the southwestern Yoruba male population in general (National Population Commission, 2004). In addition, almost none of them was unemployed. They earned on average US$ 27 a week, far above the absolute poverty line. However, if not extremely deprived economically, OPC rank-and-file militants face the typical economic vulnerabilities inherent in informal sector activities, where more than 80% of them operate.

In terms of social integration, the OPC members do not look like faithless and lawless individuals. The vast majority of them were married, had children and lived in rented houses. The militants did not hide their affiliation to the OPC: it was public knowledge in their neighbourhood for almost 70% of the respondents.

Both in economic and social terms, the OPC members we surveyed were not 'disenfranchised youth'. Rather, they were ordinary people. However, the opportunity cost of joining is far from zero – even if it is lessened by the fact that being a militia member is not a full-time activity. Thus the militia rank-and-file we interviewed should not in theory have been particularly motivated to join for purely economic incentives. The reasons they gave for doing so, and the processes through which they were recruited, are shown below.

16 The term 'loose molecules' is borrowed from Kaplan's well-known but not particularly rigorous account of Africa's social situation: 'Each time I went to the Abidjan bus terminal, groups of young men with restless, scanning eyes surrounded my taxi, putting their hands all over the windows, demanding 'tips' for carrying my luggage even though I had only a rucksack. In cities in six West African countries I saw similar young men everywhere— hordes of them. They were like loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting' (Kaplan, 2000, p. 5).

Figure 2 synthesises the answers given on motives and recruitment channels. Immediate material benefits are not the primary motive for enlistment, confirming our findings on the militants' socio-economic profiles. On the contrary, perceived indirect benefits such as protection and promotion of social status constitute major incentives for enlistment.

Figure 2. Enlistment motives and recruitment processes

When joining the militia, did you expect that your new situation could…	(%)
facilitate your access to cash	11
increase your chances to get a new/better job	17
facilitate your contacts with the opposite sex	22
improve the way you are considered in the neighbourhood	45
grant you new powers to defend yourself and your relatives	90
expand your political awareness	31
Did a particular event decide you to join?	**(%)**
a personal event	19
a political event	15
Difference between the militia and other political or cultural organisations	**(%)**
well-organised	19
honest behaviour	65
political project	29
better for business	4
more protective	41
Channels of recruitment	**(%)**
friends, neighbours	60
Patronage	22
spontaneous application	18

Source: Y. Guichaoua (2010)

Immediate economic reasons (such as access to cash or a better job) are given in fewer than one case out of five. When we explored this issue further with our respondents, most of them told us that being a militant is actually costly: in addition to fees paid weekly when attending meetings, the regular purchase of the charms necessary to participate in group activities entails a significant outlay. The most frequent reason given for joining was the desire for protection. Charms obtained through OPC membership are reputed to favour economic prosperity, good health, social success and, above all, protection against enemies (notably the police). In short, what seems to fuel enlistment is a feeling of vulnerability. This is confirmed by individual reports, mentioning, for example, the 'fear of [an] unknown future' as an impetus for affiliation. Anxiety as a motivator for enlistment is also present in the respondents' justifications for choosing the OPC rather than any other group: a large majority of them praised the OPC's 'neat [i.e. honest] behaviour': unlike political parties or local self-help groups, the organisation 'doesn't cheat' its members. The OPC is viewed as a group that cares for its needy followers. It is expected to have an immediate, direct and positive impact on its members' well-being. Among the many positive characteristics of the OPC quoted by respondents were: 'solidarity',[17] 'oneness' and 'togetherness'. All these expressions refer to protection, a sense of belonging and, to some extent, spiritual elevation.

17 'Solidarity for ever' is the group motto, chanted repetitively during meetings.

Importantly, whether through increased personal prestige or the enlargement of bonding social connections, the OPC is also perceived by many as a facilitator of status promotion: almost 45% of the respondents anticipated that by joining the OPC, the personal respect they enjoyed in their neighbourhood would improve. A not insignificant proportion of respondents (22%) also said that contact with the opposite sex was made easier by membership.

These views seem to be influenced and encouraged by the militants' entourage, which often facilitates enlistment. Fewer than one out of five respondents spontaneously applied to join the OPC. Others were recommended by friends and patrons, who were generally already members. Social capital is clearly at play here. But one should note that recruitment through friends and recruitment through patrons may have different consequences for the type of socialisation the group produces locally: solidarity among equals differs from paternalistic distribution through patronage. In the Lagos zone surveyed, most of the militants were recruited by the coordinator from his immediate social network. This was a way for the coordinator to distribute personal favours and hence to reinforce his local patronage. Recruiting OPC members appears to be a highly 'social capital intensive' activity.

Purely ideological motives for enlistment are less salient than motives of security, solidarity or insurance mediated by a strong sense of social belonging. As shown in Figure 2, only 31% of the respondents thought that becoming an OPC member could expand their political awareness. Stressing the salience of non ideology-related motives does not necessarily cast doubt on our respondents' sincerity towards the OPC as a political 'cause'. All the respondents had assimilated the Yoruba nationalist rhetoric of their leaders. When asked by the interviewer to describe what the OPC is, without hesitation and almost systematically, they put forward its collective objective of 'promoting and protecting Yoruba interests in Nigeria'. However, ideological adherence to the organisation does not rule out other, much more diverse, considerations when joining. It might simply constitute a fundamental consensus among the militants, beyond which many other characteristics make membership of the organisation desirable.

Does the OPC match the expectations of its militants? A look at the immediate actual gains obtained through militia membership confirms this. It shows that protection and assistance are effectively provided by the OPC. This protection is both material, and symbolic or spiritual (in the form of charms, also called *jujus*). Cash is offered to militants in case of injury, illness or other personal disasters. Strikingly, the OPC supersedes even family as a source of assistance: the group can be said to form a social space which reliably provides help. In addition, a great majority of the militia rank-and-file benefit from the more regular, although indirect, solidarity offered by ongoing business relationships. The OPC is therefore not only an informal insurance mechanism, protecting its members against unusual risks, it also forms a restricted sphere of continuous economic exchanges, for the exclusive benefit of its members. Obviously one cannot rule out the possibility that an informal solidarity network, such as the one which binds together the OPC militants, predated their membership: as we have already noted, recruitment is frequently channelled through existing social bonds. However, OPC membership clearly represents an opportunity to strengthen, formalise and probably enhance (for example, through vigilantism) the benefits of this 'moral economy'.[18] These solidarity ties do not necessarily result in a tangible improvement of the respondent's economic situation; but they do produce a dramatic improvement in their feelings of protection and psychological comfort. 'Peace of mind', 'rest of mind' and 'confidence' were very often cited as the major changes that membership offered.

The OPC shares many features with the sectarian groups and club goods providers described by Iannaccone and Berman (2006): entry requires sacrifices (in our case, oath taking, the devotion of time, displays of courage and the purchase of *jujus*) which helps to screen applicants and reinforces the credibility of their commitment toward the group. Such groups are likely to emerge in contexts where the provision of social services by the government is low,

18 An individual case we observed perfectly illustrates this point: a state representative we regularly interacted with was running a private security outfit. Although he swore his militancy and his business activities were totally disconnected, most of his employees were actually OPC militants from his locality.

which is clearly the case in Nigeria. The OPC functions as a club goods provider or a restrict-ed 'moral economy' whose members, tied to each other by a dense web of horizontal every-day transactions, enjoy self-insurance in an environment perceived as unsafe. Social capital and regular business contacts are inextricably entwined, ensuring the militia's continued existence.

3.4 'Moral outrage' and combatants' solidary ethos: Tuareg 'ishumar'

As we have seen above, the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) in Niger has a mixed membership, including disaffected members of the military who seek privileges for themselves, and activist members of the diaspora, who strive to give the movement a polit-ical content. In addition, the MNJ has at least one more stratum of militants: the so-called *ishumar*, or unemployed youths, who generally enlist as rank-and-file members. We met some of them in Tamanrasset in May 2009.

These low-level combatants did not join the MNJ immediately after its creation. Most of them joined after August 2007, i.e. six months after the official birth of the movement. Unlike the initiators and early joiners of the 2007 rebellion, these are not ex-combatants from the rebellion of the 1990s. They are youths from Agadez and Arlit, the two major northern cities, who thought that the situation was ripe for them to join. In Tamgak, the headquarters of the MNJ in the Aïr Mountains, they lived as combatants for the first time.

Although it is hard to find any one particular event which spurred them to join, the notorious and bloody army killing of three old men in Tezirzeit (in the Aïr Mountains) in May 2007, and other exactions by the Forces Armées Nigeriennes (FAN), were often cited as a trigger. This would seem to confirm Kalyvas and Kocher's theory (2007) that one of the motivations for joining rebel groups is avoidance of indiscriminate governmental repression. Our respond-ents also perceived rising tension in the years preceding the outbreak of violence in 2007. One further factor prompting enlistment was the development of the huge, new uranium mining complex at Imouraren by the French energy company AREVA. Many locals were determined not to be excluded from any deal struck this time round, partly in reaction to previous experience of AREVA's operations in the 1970s: the company was then based in Arlit, but recruited most of its skilled labour force from the distant state capital, Niamey. According to our respondents, in 2004-2005 the inhabitants of Arlit and Agadez also saw many Chinese engineers travelling across the desert, carrying heavy measuring instru-ments, as part of the government's plans to distribute mining concessions. Finally they could clearly see that the peace agreements of the late 1990s were going nowhere.

The subjective, less immediate reasons behind the Tamanrasset's combatants' decision to join the MNJ revolve around three interconnected themes: racism, unequal access to jobs and territorial sovereignty. All three contributed to a sense of deepening 'moral outrage' over the years. When talking about their education, the interviewees' offered a lot of anec-dotal evidence showing open rejection of their Tuareg identity by non-Tuareg teachers or classmates. This discrimination continued after their schooldays, when these young men sought jobs and tried to pass jobs interviews or civil service exams: I was given countless examples where my respondents were passed over for jobs in favour of candidates who were 'not known by anyone', 'not born in Agadez', 'not brought up among us', and, impor-tantly, 'not more qualified than we are'.

The feeling of injustice was reinforced by the fact that MNJ combatants consider the northern region as their own. This does not just express sentimental attachment. Tuaregs have plenty of very practical abilities inextricably linked to their life in the desert which sustain their sense of territorial belonging. The desert is their land and there was a shared feeling among our respondents that the Tuaregs are being dispossessed. In fact, the view that Agadez is suffering a second colonisation by the 'southerners' is commonplace in the interviews I carried out, not only those in Tamanrasset, but also in 2007 in Agadez and Niamey. This feeling engendered racist statements among my respondents, such as 'we're occupied by the blacks' – as the Tuaregs see themselves as 'whites'. This distinction carries a heavy historical weight since, in past centuries, the sedentary 'blacks' (notably the Hausas) lived under Tuareg dominion, and were regularly raided by the Tuaregs, who used them as slaves.

Struggling to find employment and feeling discriminated against, the fighters I met were living the typical *ishumar* life: with only temporary jobs in tourism to sustain them, most of their time was spent in idleness with other young, unmarried males, playing the guitar, smoking, drinking and engaging in political debates until dawn. Being an *achamor* is much more than simply being unemployed. It carries quasi-socialist values: *ishumar* live together, eat together, sing together and share their belongings. They form a small, all-male cell of solidarity ties and a space for political debate which tends to be self-validating. The music they listen to describes their daily misery, glorifies the desert, celebrates friendship ties and urges them to stand up. The stigma of unemployment has somehow turned to pride. Our point is that the *teshumara* offers an alternative lifestyle, and one which is well suited to war.[19]

So what does 'going to Tamgak' or 'exiting' (*sortir*) mean in this context? It would seem to imply an extension of the *teshumara* lifestyle, but with the additional satisfaction that, at least in theory, they are contributing to political change. By enlisting, the *ishumar* feel that they are acting collectively and productively: 'we maintain our culture and we advance it at the same time'. Such a statement takes us quite a way from the standard motivations for collective action and moves us closer to what Wood has termed 'the pleasure of agency' (Wood, 2003). Fear of risking one's life, sacrifice, military discipline and duty are obviously part of the mix. But what the militants insisted on was the joy of rejoining their Agadez friends – sometimes after days of lonely trekking in the desert – and the liberating experience that being in Tamgak represented for them. Rebelling is not just about obtaining more from the central authorities (including political representation, jobs, and access to the revenues from uranium mining); it is also about promoting a different social model, which draws on a renewed Tuareg identity.

Joining up and staying for a while in Tamgak is about 'learning' and 'living an adventure', far more than it is about obeying orders and being under the command of military chiefs. Discipline in Tamgak is pretty loose. New recruits formally seal their loyalty to the group by swearing on the Quran,[20] before their military abilities are tested. They then receive a military rank, but this is 'more a public display of respect than a real military rank'. The fighting community, like the urban *ishumar*, is egalitarian: rewards are banned because – as I was told – 'to reward is to divide'. However, it should be noted that arms are selectively distributed to combatants on the basis of 'merit'.

Defecting is permitted and not necessarily associated with betrayal of the cause. Intelligence on behalf of the enemy may be suspect, but 'if you betray us, that's a problem between you and your conscience'.[21] The leadership is respected but not blindly worshipped. The fact that some of the leaders might be opportunists is fully acknowledged but this does not cast doubt on the *ishumars*' own motives to enlist, as decisions are primarily the outcome of individuals' internal deliberations: 'everybody has to make his own revolution'; 'the leaders just took the first step'.

Judging from the accounts of the Tamanrasset militants, the MNJ would seem to be a 'hop on-hop off' rebellion, only loosely controlled by its leaders. The interviewees might have exaggerated their own role in the process of enlistment when describing it to me. Yet their

19 It actually recalls the lifestyle of some of the groups on the radical left in Europe and the US in the 1970s, such as the Weathermen (Sommier, 2008).

20 Dandois and Creisson (2008) mention that new recruits swear a threefold oath : they promise to obey their chiefs; never to attack civilians; and never to loot (p. 143).

21 This principle strikingly contrasts with the norm that prevailed in many Latin American insurgencies where defectors were physically eliminated, as potential informants to government troops (Arenas, 1972).

detailed personal stories do show a high degree of independent reflection and stress that, with the exception of a few close friends (i.e. chosen social relations), no-one had to be consulted when deciding whether or not to join. In addition, the military structure they describe hardly resembles the clear hierarchy that an 'industrial organization of violence' would suggest.

Having discussed and illustrated the complexities of individual participation in violent mobilisation, we now turn to a contextualised understanding of their behaviours. A key focus here is the armed organisation, which stands at the interface between its social base (civilians and low level combatants) and the broader (national and international) strategic and logistical constraints.

Pending puzzles: understanding the diversity of organised violence and the dynamics of armed groups

The previous section has shown that no single, undisputable reason emerges to explain enlistment in violent groups. Instead, we have seen a series of possible causes that can only fully be understood when considered in context. These change as the conflict unfolds. Making sense of the diversity of forms of violent engagement and modelling the dynamics of violence are among the greatest analytical challenges of today.

4.1 Making sense of the behavioural diversity of armed groups

The most advanced, although still partial, attempt to explain the diversity of patterns of organised violence has been made by Weinstein (2006). This account of the 'industrial organization of violence' concludes that fundraising is the key determinant in shaping recruitment strategies and violent behaviours. Weinstein suggests two types of rebellion exist: 'activist' and 'opportunist' and argues that the proportion of politicised activists and opportunists within a rebellion stems directly from the financial constraints faced by the rebel leaders. Well-funded rebellions tend to attract opportunists, recruits driven by the immediate prospects of profit; while financially constrained rebellions have to resort to activitsts, recruits who can be mobilised through social bonds and who are less attracted by quick material rewards. Patterns of violence can be derived from this model: opportunists display relatively less discipline and are more likely to perpetrate atrocities than their more ideological counterparts. The ability to sustain rebellion over time among the poorly endowed category depends on civilian support, and hence this type of rebellion makes more use of targeted violence and less of mass violence against civilians. According to Weinstein, rebels do not prey on civilians if they need their collaboration to achieve logistical sustainability.

The strong appeal of Weinstein's perspective is that it articulates various levels of analysis into a coherent framework, ranging from the macro (the economic constraints faced by rebel leaders) to the micro (the profiles of individual recruits). The armed organisation is the locus where the demand for a violent labour force is matched by the supply of would-be combatants. Yet by granting economic factors an exclusive role in shaping the recruitment policies of armed groups – and, ultimately, the profiles of their recruits – Weinstein's model dramatically reduces the scope for other recruitment channels. Ultimately, it relies on a static dichotomy, similar to the 'greed/grievances' model whose limitations are addressed above.

Tarrow (2007) notes that Weinstein's bipolar typology may prove to be an 'analytical cage'. As noted, CRISE research on the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) shows that the militia's success derives both from significant, pre-existing social connections among its followers, and from the numerous opportunities for economic gains it offers them. The OPC functions as a club goods provider or a restricted 'moral economy', whose members, tied to each other by a dense web of horizontal, everyday transactions, enjoy self-insurance in an envi-

ronment which is perceived as unsafe. Social capital and regular business contacts are inextricably intermeshed to ensure the militia's continuation. Unequivocally, the majority of the OPC's followers do not display the socio-demographic characteristics of short-term, quasi-mercenaries; nor are they dedicated ideologues. The OPC's success in recruitment is largely based on the government's failure to deliver public goods to its vulnerable constituents, who look to the OPC for the employment and insurance that the government fails to provide.

Turning our attention to Niger's Tuareg rebels, we have identified another form of 'matching process' between the rank-and-file and their leaders. The rebellion was initially triggered by ex-combatants from previous rebellions who had been excluded from the peace arrangements, and who were also involved in cross-border trafficking. But these ex-combatants were soon joined by revolutionary groups of Tuareg youths, with quasi-socialist ideas and lifestyles, locally known as *ishumar*. Yet, these youths showed very conditional support for their leaders. And the leadership itself was prone to factionalise and to pursue self-interested aims. The Tuareg rebellion owes its existence to circumstantial alliances and a diffusion of grievances provoked by local micro-political dynamics and the long-standing economic disenfranchisement of some sections of the Tuareg youth. Additionally, one decisive event in the *ishumar*'s decision to join was the national army's heavy-handed repression of civilians. Such reasons to join may not be profoundly motivated but rather dictated by necessity, as described by Kalyvas and Kocher (2007).

Independent of any economic determinism, what both our case studies from Nigeria and Niger suggest is that inflows of new recruits at key turning points in the conflict (such as the killing of civilians by governmental forces) changed the nature of the armed groups. The paths taken by these organisations' may therefore not simply result from structural conditions, but may be the consequence of complex and contradictory internal and external forces. A similar argument holds for the forms of violence perpetrated, where the quality of the leadership has been shown to be of importance. For example, Wood (2009) demonstrates that groups such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, which severely punish wrongdoers (such as rapists) and discipline their rank-and-file through solid ideological training, manage to avoid sexual aggression against civilians.

Weinstein's model, for all its stringent analysis, does not provide a fully satisfactory answer to the question of what determines the behaviour of armed groups. Why, for example, do some groups become seriously violent towards civilians, while others do not? Why do certain groups build a strong ideological apparatus, while others do not? And when and why does collaboration between combatants and non-combatant populations occur? This is a comparative research area which is developing quickly. While the role of funding continues to be explored, new hypotheses on the drivers of armed group behaviours include the role of international actors (for example, diasporas, the media, international NGOs and foreign regional powers); the quality of pre-existing institutions; prevailing social norms; the ethnic composition of the territories controlled by occupying forces; and the strategic imperatives of gathering local intelligence to entrench military supremacy.

4.2 How do armed organisations perpetuate themselves, or disappear?

A second under-researched set of issues concerns the histories of armed groups. The survival of non-state armed groups may largely depend on their 'strategic interactions' with opposing parties, i.e. the course of war itself. A vast literature now studies counter-insurgency strategies and the relative merits of repression versus 'winning heart and minds' (through such development projects as road building and electrification). 'Hearts and minds' is said to prevent the negative effects of repression, not only by avoiding casualties but also by avoiding further insurgent mobilisation engendered by indiscriminate aggression against non-combatants, in accordance with Kalyvas and Kocher's model. But the common wisdom – that counter-insurgency boosts insurgency instead of suppressing it, and which is supported by many historical anecdotal accounts – has recently been challenged. Lyall (2009) found that in Chechnyan villages shelled between 2000 and 2005, insurgency significantly decreased after the bombings. However it is too early to reach any definitive conclusion on this hotly debated topic.

The survival of non-state armed groups is also clearly related to their behavioural strategies. Recruiting patterns, relations with civilians or the types of violence in use affect the capacity of armed organisations to prolong their existence. Weinstein argues that groups brought together solely through material bonds will have a greater propensity to unravel than groups endowed with firmly entrenched ideological or social bonds. Indeed, economic incentives to demobilise have proved effective with members of groups mainly composed of quasi-mercenaries. In Niger, arms were laid down immediately after Colonel Gaddafi entered the scene and offered financial rewards to rebel leaders.

This may be a problem specific to weak states structured along neo-patrimonial networks of powers, typical of Sub-Saharan Africa. Many authors have highlighted the seeming inability of African civil society to reform. Ultimately, all well intentioned initiatives are either forcefully repressed or, more often, absorbed and privatised by revenue-seeking state-sponsored agents (Bayart, 2009; Mbembe, 1992; Chabal and Daloz, 1999). The same holds good for armed groups, which may initially sponsor a welcome, reformist agenda (such as the fairer redistribution of natural resource revenues between regions), but sooner or later become engulfed and instrumentalised by mainstream party politics. Violent groups are then incorporated into existing networks of political patronage. This was the case for most Nigerian militias, all connected in some ways with official political figures. This process may have an immediate benefit, as violent confrontations cease. But this short-term pay-off is likely to be outweighed in the long run. Firstly, financial deals favour the criminalisation of politics and the use of mass violence as a way to extort revenues. In the Niger Delta, criminal acts such as hostage-taking and 'oil bunkering' are now deeply entrenched in the local political economy (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Extra-legal forms of governance take root and harm prospects for development. Secondly, financial deals with insurgents are highly likely to provoke greater anger among those who are excluded.[22] The latest rebellion in Niger clearly illustrates this: its leaders were all mid-level commanders of the previous rebellion whose demands had remained unaddressed. Today, increased banditry or, worse still, alliances with transnational terrorist groups present in the area, may result from the ineffective peace settlements implemented in northern Niger.[23] Thirdly, short-term financial deals are made at the expense of longer term deeply needed structural reforms (Reno, 2002). In northern Niger today, the rebellion has officially ended but structural policies promoting a fairer and more transparent use of mining revenues, once central to the rebels' demands, are nowhere to be seen. The spectre of a 'neither war nor peace' order looms, a situation that may well serve the interests of incumbent elites but destroy the legitimate aspirations of the majority to development.

22 Whether these deals are state-sponsored or struck by multinational companies, as is the case in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2007), does not greatly change the outcome.

23 This view is supported by the most recent hostage-taking between the Algerian frontier and Agadez, which implies that criminal activities are expanding eastwards from northern Mali.

5 Policy implications

It is difficult to draw overall policy implications and our message is necessarily one of analytical modesty and a warning against monocausal explanations of mobilisation for violence. The current scholarly debate is increasingly informed by serious, in-depth empirical work, and shows just how important a careful identification of needs on a case by case basis is: the same interventions in different settings may bring about radically different consequences. For example, UN intervention in Mozambique and Angola in the early 1990s was very similar; but whereas it succeeded in Mozambique, in Angola it failed. It is generally argued that this was due to the economic exhaustion of the warring parties in Mozambique, while access to the proceeds from oil- and diamond-mining fuelled the Angolan armed factions, giving them little incentive to stop fighting. Identifying and contextualising the logics at play in a given conflict, and the level on which they operate, lay the groundwork for fine-tuned intervention. Thus, while not being able to provide universal guidance, we can derive some policy messages from our own work in Nigeria and Niger.

Our findings in Nigeria highlight how the absence of the provision of basic services by the state fuels enlistment in ethnic militias. The self-insurance mechanisms offered by the OPC have been shown to be the main drivers of engagement of grassroots militants, even superseding the hopes of immediate material rewards. The majority of joiners have families, run licit – albeit informal – businesses and aspire to 'neatness' and 'togetherness', i.e. solidarity: all characteristics that many ordinary Nigerians share. These are not fundamentally anti-social attitudes or worldviews which should be eliminated by force. Quite the opposite, provision of both economic and physical security to populations might be the best way to prevent such groups sustaining their activities and contesting the state's monopoly over coercive means.

Similarly, the concerns of the Tuareg *ishumar* echo pretty standard and widespread aspirations for transparent access to jobs, fair use of extractive revenues or cultural recognition. Interestingly, the *ishumar* would probably not have participated in violent action had some specialists of violence (in the form of dissatisfied veterans) not given them the opportunity to do so. This is another lesson: followers and leaders should be offered specific policy packages in order to end hostilities. However, in all cases, long-term solutions should be given priority. Examples of this would include rolling out disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes at the same time as more traditional microcredit schemes, thus helping legal economic activities to take lasting root; generating employment opportunities; and addressing underlying horizontal inequalities (HIs). In this way, no 'reserve army' of unemployed youths would be available to serve the revenue-seeking interests of veterans who have turned to smuggling. More often than not short-term solutions are adopted, which only stop the violence temporarily. As one Tuareg interviewee commented, somewhat ironically, when discussing the amounts offered by the DDR programme implemented in the aftermath of the 1990s rebellion: 'it's not much money, but it still can pay for two AK-47s'. This anecdote has far-reaching echoes. It points to the above-mentioned problem of neo-patrimonialism in the running of African political affairs which dramatically incapacitates reformist initiatives to protect the short-term benefits of incumbent elites.

Finally, adequate attention should be placed on the 'demand side' of political violence: why people join is a complex mix of push and pull factors. As shown by our Niger case study, pull factors are extremely powerful in the specific political economy of the Saharan region, based on growing illegal cross-border trafficking. This situation requires coordinated regional policies to prevent roving bandits and their political and military accomplices from instituting local forms of governance exclusively shaped to protect criminal interests.

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Front cover image: Militants from the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
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