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Who Joins Ethnic Militias? A Survey of the Oodua People's Congress in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

The economic analysis of conflicts assigns a crucial role to the rebellion making process. However, the existing literature on this issue often rests on unsatisfactory micro-foundations. It tends to overemphasize two extreme forms of mobilisation, namely purely greed-driven or, alternatively, purely ideology-driven. It does not fully address the puzzles associated with the leader-followers interaction within violent organisations. The present paper is an empirical account describing how rank and file members of an ethnic militia are mobilised. The survey shows that the purely economic explanation of violent mobilisation does not hold despite the fact the militia levers its own funds. At least two other considerations are at play for members: first, the feeling of danger, the desire of protection against fuzzily identified risks (criminality, unknown future, menace from other ethnic groups etc.); second, the social proximity to militia insiders. In fact, vulnerability (either perceived or real) might be a more decisive factor in enlistment than poverty *per se*. Additionally, the paper suggests that the militia studied in Nigeria doesn't fit the usual binary classification of rebel groups (predatory or ideological) as it is simultaneously an economic, social and political actor in the communities where it operates.

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By Yvan Guichaoua[1]

1. Introduction

The economic analysis of conflicts assigns a crucial role to the rebellion making process. However, the existing literature on this issue often rests on unsatisfactory micro-foundations. It tends to overemphasize two extreme forms of mobilisation, namely purely greed-driven or, alternatively, purely ideology-driven motivation. It doesn't fully address the puzzles associated with the leader-followers interaction within violent organisations. This paper is an empirical account describing how rank and file are mobilised. Section II discusses the existing conceptual frameworks through which violent mobilisation is usually analysed and points to their limitations. Section III presents the background of our survey on grassroots followers in one ethnic militia in Nigeria. Section IV describes the profiles of militia members and describes the motives sustaining their enlistment. It particularly assesses the "loose molecule" hypothesis stipulating that those with fewer opportunities on the "legal" labour market have a greater incentive to join. Section V concludes.

2. The leader-followers interaction in rebel groups: Acknowledging the plurality of combatants' organisations

The pioneering work on the economic causes of conflicts that has been carried out under the World Bank auspices for almost a decade now has assigned a crucial role to rebellions in triggering civil wars. Indeed, the general perspective developed by this stream of literature considers that the onset of civil wars primarily depends on the decision of rebels to overthrow the government in place. Unlike incumbents, that are granted the role of passive prey, rebellions are active predators endangering political stability. Rather artificially, partly to keep the model technically tractable, this picture tends to single out one of the many possible actors in a civil war and overemphasize its weight in the course of events. The possibility that rebellions are born out of past repression by the incumbents is not envisaged (Guichaoua (2005)).

Bearing in mind these methodological and analytical caveats, recent conflictual episodes, particularly in Africa (Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Casamance, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire…), have shown how non governmental armed groups contribute to the precipitation of violence and thus make crucial an analysis of their origins, characteristics and internal organisation. Our main concern here is to identify how rebellions manage to gather support, i.e. enlist members ready to risk their life for a

[1] I warmly thank Michael Eshiemokhai and Martins Arogundade whose assistance in the empirical part of the present research has been tremendously valuable. I am also grateful to Dr. Albert Olawale and Stephen Faleti who facilitated my field work in many ways. The present paper has also benefited from numerous and insightful comments from colleagues at the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (Oxford) and participants of various seminars where it was presented: Centre for the Study of African Economies (Oxford), Centre d'Etudes d'Afrique Noire (Bordeaux). All remaining errors and approximations are mine.

cause that might never be achieved. Our focus is placed on the profiles and motives that make followers likely to subscribe to the projects of their chiefs[2].

What causes low levels members of a rebel hierarchy to follow their leaders? We discuss three possible analytical approaches, starting with the behavioural assumptions implicit in the economic literature on conflicts. First, one can model the decision to join the rebellion by using a unitary framework which implies the perfect convergence of leaders' and followers' motives and preferences. Such an approach is generally based on the usual economics of crime rationale. A second way of dealing with the problem has been used, consisting of juxtaposing two exclusive families of motives within the rebel organisation: greed for leaders and ideological motives for followers respectively. We explore the possibility of a third way, which combines material and non-material interests in the motive to join violent political mobilisation. Importantly, the latter stance doesn't necessarily entail being agnostic: we consider that the analytical framework should allow the most salient enlistment-conducive factors to emerge from a close empirical investigation rather than ruling out some of them *ex ante*. Following recent accounts in the literature (Sambanis (2001), Gates (2002), Weinstein (2005)), we also suggest that the profiles of the militants selected are closely linked with some features of the organisation, notably its financial constraints.

2.1. The contested "loose molecule" hypothesis

Collier and Hoeffler (1998)'s original work on the economic causes of conflicts borrow their microeconomic rationale from the longstanding Beckerian tradition in understanding criminal behaviour (Becker (1968)). What differentiates the respective crimes of petty shoplifters and nationalist rebels is not their essential nature but the scale of their acts. According to Collier (2000): "rebellions are a distinctive type of criminal activity in that the labour force engaged in the activity is both large and organised into a single enterprise" (p. 841-2). Rebellions require collective coordination. The question is then whether one should consider that both leaders and followers share the same kind of intentions. By using a representative agent model, Collier and Hoeffler tend to answer that leaders and followers' sets of motives and preferences converge totally. Therefore, one should be allowed to apply to followers the basic prediction of Beckerian crime models, namely that those with the poorer economic opportunities in the legal labour market, are the more likely to join the illegal rebel activity. Practically, poverty, poor education and lack of sanctions by the immediate social environment should be good predictors of enlistment in paramilitary Mafia-like movements. A folk sociology could refer to these profiles as "loose molecules" (jobless, faithless, dissocialised).

The profiles most closely reflecting this theory should be those of pure mercenaries. Indeed, empirically, the presence of greedy mercenaries drawn from the lumpen youth cannot be ignored in zones such as the Guinea Gulf in Africa. In Sierra-Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, nomadic groups of fighters offer their help in diverse rebellions in exchange for immediate material benefits. They might change their allegiance if better opportunities were offered elsewhere (Human Rights Watch (2005)). Importantly however, this "commodification" of violence is an extreme example, restricted to areas having a long experience of violent conflicts. Alternative pieces of evidence, gathered in various geographical and political settings, nuance, if they do not contradict, the general character of the mercenary/loose molecule assumption.

[2] A more detailed account of the origins of the militia surveyed in the present paper, namely the Oodua People's Congress, is given by Guichaoua (2005)

First, Krueger and Maleckova (2003), analysing quantitative and qualitative data on the profiles of Hezbollah fighters and suicide bombers in Lebanon and Gaza Strip observe that "poverty is inversely related with the likelihood that someone becomes a Hezbollah fighter, and education is positively related with the likelihood that someone becomes a Hezbollah fighter" (p. 25). The message that their analysis delivers is that "instead of viewing terrorism as a direct response to low market opportunities or ignorance, we suggest it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings (either perceived or real) of indignity and frustration that have little to do with economics" (p. 1). To Krueger and Maleckova, ideological factors play a decisive role in the violent flare-ups.

Sanin (2004) also highlights the non-economic dimension of motives among members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). The FARC scrupulously control the material benefits potentially derived by members from their activity; they firmly prohibit looting and, at a social level, promote an ascetic type of life (life-militancy and quasi-exclusive dedication to the rebellion's activities with the impossibility of having children) that can hardly fit into the greed-motivated mobilisation perspective. Furthermore, from an historical point of view, to Sanin, illegal crop plantations, although they have permitted the economic sustainability of the FARC can by no means be said to have constituted the confiscable booty justifying the rebellion design and the followers' enlistment. Sanin concludes: "people enlist in guerrillas following a mélange of motivations – vengeance, prestige, fear, hate, even excitement, where strictly materialist ones do not always appear, because those organisations have explicit bureaucratic methods of internal distribution that disallow practices like looting, and may even prevent salary-paying. This is common knowledge for both recruiters and recruited" (p. 272).

An additional case study can be cited which focuses on Sierra-Leone (Humphreys and Weinstein (2004)) and draws similar conclusions. It is based on a survey of former militia fighters of the multiple militias that were active during the recent civil conflict. Here again the empirical statement is nuanced. Humphreys and Weinstein observe a great diversity of profiles, motives and conditions of involvement in the various factions. Some militias are largely composed of farmers; others rely on students. Some fighters may have joined voluntarily; others (especially children) are coerced into the militia through abduction. Some fighters' profiles meet the "loose molecule hypothesis" while others express pure vengeance or self-protection motives. Moreover, generally speaking, Sierra-Leone's major lootable natural resource, diamonds, does not constitute an immediate concern for combatants who, Humphreys and Weinstein argue, fight for more localised and mundane reasons. This doesn't mean that materialist benefits are absent from their calculus but rather that these expected gains are different from those of the leaders. An implication of this observation is that followers should be recognised as having their own agency, separate from that of the leaders.

Before turning to a more general overview of the range of possible micro-motives for political violence, let's discuss, after *greed*, its theoretical counterpoint, well acknowledged in the sociological and political science literature, namely *ideology*, to which many of the case studies presented above refer.

2.2. Leaders' greedy intentions and followers' primordialist mystification

At the other extremity of the range of channels of violent mobilisation that have been put forward in the conflict-related literature stands the "primordialist" argument,

according to which nearly genetic intergroup hatreds lead to violent clashes[3]. In fact, although it violates the basic premises of methodological individualism, Collier (2000) doesn't strictly rule out the possibility that mobilisation emerges from ideological concerns, which, in his work, are associated with group grievances[4]. However this lever of action seems to be circumscribed to particular operations (gathering finance, recruiting), particular actors (followers), at particular points of time (inception of the rebellion).

First, primordialist tendencies may help levying funds. Collier argues that "a political entrepreneur seeking to fund a loot-seeking rebellion may need to rekindle dormant grievances to generate start-up finance" (p. 851) and later extends his rationale: "grievance may enable a rebel organisation to grow the point at which it is viable as a predator; greed may sustain the organisation once it has reached this point" (p. 852). The finality of the rebellion is then unaffected by its temporary grievance-driven development: loot remains the ultimate objective of rebels. Grievance is temporarily instrumentalised by the rebellion's leaders. As a result, the followers, sincere in their attachment to a collective "cause" rather than purely materialistic interests, are duped by their chiefs.

Primordial proximity fulfils another function. It fosters cohesion within the group of rebels; it makes rank and file militants stick to their chiefs in an organisation constantly threatened, as any other collective enterprise, by opportunistic behaviours: "successful military action depends on officers being given operational command of their troops, but this make it relatively easy for such officers to contest the leadership of the rebellion. The typical solution that rebel leaders adopt in response to these problems is to confine recruitment to those strata of the population that enable the rebel organisation to be cohesive. Recruits share a common ethnic, religious, or class background" (p. 843). Collective action problems faced by rebellions, such as asymmetric information, are practically solved in a rather *ad hoc* way, through the intervention of the *deus ex machina* of ethnicity. Are common language and behavioural codes sufficient to ensure the enforcement of leaders' instructions? It seems that followers are subject to a sort of cognitive mystification set up by their chiefs. Their enlistment is based on a fallacy. How can followers remain blind over time to the true intentions of their chiefs?

By introducing a degree of ideological motive in the rebellion-making process, Collier certainly makes the early, merely materialist, version of his approach more sophisticated. Still though, in epistemological terms, how satisfactory is the segmented view which assigns perfect anticipations and agency capacity to leaders and blunt primordialism to followers? Sociological approaches have a natural tendency to favour non-greed-based explanations to behaviours, and, specifically, perception-based ones. However, there are ways to avoid endorsing a full "analytical primordialism" by considering the attachment to particular identities as a cognitive phenomenon (Brubaker and Cooper (2000); Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov (2004)). Ideologies are the result of complex centripetal and centrifugal forces. Internally, they may be created and entertained by political demagogues through

[3] The "genetic" version of primordialism stands here as an extreme point of view. It is actually not espoused as such by most of the students of civil conflicts although "bioeconomic" approaches of conflicts tend to essentialise reciprocal xenophobia technically encompassed in group-specific sets of preferences (see Hirshleifer (2001)).

[4] "Even if rebellions are not caused by group grievances, they are surely in some way related to them. A convincing account of rebellion must therefore offer some explanation as to why rebellions so often adopt the discourse of grievance and the battle lines of ethnic, religious or class divisions" (p. 840).

various channels provoking "dissimilation" (Lake and Rothchild (1998); Rothchild and Groth (1995))[5]. Centrifugal forces include exclusionary practices, group discrimination or derogatory political discourses about the opponents (Brubaker and Laitin (1998)). On the "demand side", i.e. at the rank and file level, ideologies may be accepted, memorised and disseminated or not according to, among other criteria, their property of being "easy to think" or not (Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 32). Ideologies, grievance feelings, interethnic hatreds certainly don't constitute objective entities. Furthermore, and crucially, the channel through which these subjective perceptions should result in the perpetration of violence is loosely explained by the tenets of this stream of thought. As rightly put by Brubaker and Laitin (1998): "such accounts […] tend to explain too much and to overpredict ethnic violence. They cannot explain why violence occurs only at particular times and places, and why, even at such times and places, only some persons participate in it" (p. 443)[6].

2.3. Acknowledging and making sense of the plurality of forms of violent mobilisation

The contrasting evidence summarised above and the methodological and epistemological difficulties raised in the preceding section should lead the student of civil conflicts – and more specifically of the process of violent mobilisation - to analytical caution. Indeed methodological pragmatism should incite the researcher to avoid ruling out any potential route to violent political mobilisation before any actual empirical scrutiny takes place. Materialistic interests and feelings of group marginalisation reviewed so far can be complemented by or substituted for other channels, already incidentally mentioned here, like coercion or psychological processes such as fear or anxiety. Williams (2000) and Gambetta (2000) provide a practical typology of circumstances leading to cooperation between agents that can help to understand how violence can be achieved collectively: "the mechanisms which motivate cooperation in any form of human endeavour […] comprise four basic elements: coercion, interests, values, and personal bonds. People, that is, may decide to cooperate (1) for fear of sanctions; (2) because cooperation enhances their mutual economic interests; (3) because they have general reasons, whether cultural, moral or religious, to believe that cooperation is good irrespective of sanctions and rewards; and finally (4) because they are related to one another by bonds of kin or friendship" (p. 164).

Interestingly, these patterns of cooperation are those explored in the research frontier models of crime economics, alternatively focusing on the role of social networks, "street culture" or racial beliefs (Calvo-Armengol and Zenou (2004); Silverman (2004); Verdier and Zenou (2004)). For example, Calvo-Armengol and Zenou (2004) who model the impact of the density and the structure of networks on crime levels reach the conclusion that "different locations with the same economic fundamentals need not experience the same crime level when the social arrangements differ across these areas" (p. 953). Using a similar line of argument, Oxoby (2004) studies the role of peer effects combined with psychological discomfort (cognitive dissonance) triggered by frustrated status expectations in fostering socially costly

[5] Techniques of ethnic politics include the manipulation of the media, to organisation of cultural festivals, the re-invention and celebration of a glorious collective history, the denunciation of alleged group economic or political marginalisation. For an illustration of the "invention" of culture in the European context, see Avanza (2003).

[6] For a discussion on the necessity to be ideologically "motivated to kill" based on first and second World Wars exemples, see Mariot (2003).

behaviours[7]. Violent mobilisation could be an outcome of such processes as the empirical statements below will suggest. Moreover, peers may not be the only social connexions influencing the choices to join violent mobilisation. In the West African context particularly, clientelistic systems of personal allegiance constitute a highly plausible form of recruitment[8].

Additionally, one should stress that acknowledging the plurality of forms of violent mobilisation does not rule out the possibility of analysing them at a more general level. Indeed, several contributions in the field of civil war research have attempted to make sense of the multiple plausible channels through which collective violence happens. Sambanis (2001) and Gates (2002) envisage two possible violent configurations: they make a neat distinction between ethnic and non ethnic wars and link their respective probability of arising to local economic factors. More specifically, Sambanis and Gates highlight the affinity between low economic opportunities arising from the rebellion and ethnic war on one side and high economic opportunities arising from the rebellion and predatory non ethnic wars, on the other side. The rationale behind these relationships, though rather primitive, is the following: "survival of ethnic identity has utility in itself and can explain why members of an ethnic group would offer free labour to the rebellion as economic opportunities are outweighed by the higher expected costs of suppression of ethnic identity" (p. 267). In short, the greater the fear of being suppressed as a group, the less necessary it is to resort to material incentives to gain support. Strong identity feelings (push factors) can compensate for the absence of funds to motivate the militants (pull factors).

Weinstein (2005) goes further and abolishes the qualitative dichotomy established by Sambanis by introducing an explicit continuous trade-off between the two polar cases initially put forward. To him, the respective shares of "ideologues" and "mercenaries" within a rebellion directly derive from the financial constraints faced by rebel leaders that, in turn, result in specific recruitment policies. The rationale goes as follows: financially well-endowed rebellions will tend to attract recruits with high discount rates, i.e. driven by immediate profit prospects. In contrast financially poorly-endowed rebellions will tend to select recruits with low discount rates, to whom promises of future benefits may constitute sufficient incentives. The existence of locally lootable natural resources obviously facilitates the emergence of the first type of rebellion. To Weinstein, the lack of instant material rewards to militants may need to be complemented by non economic bonds that the term "social capital" broadly encompasses (peer effects, family ties etc. but also shared norms or ideologies). In order to make his model testable, as discount rates are empirically hardly observable, Weinstein assumes that levels of education could constitute accurate proxies for patience. The likelihood of observing highly educated people in militias is thus higher when the resources of the rebel organisation are low. Conversely, the "lumpen youths" evoked above are more likely to join "rich" violent movements.

[7] The rationale goes as follows: "Individuals who cannot obtain status based on mainstream mechanisms of social esteem may change their attitudes regarding status and compete for social position on another index. This psychological argument implies that some groups are at greater risk than others of abandoning mainstream status norms. For example, if status is traditionally allocated based on income, individuals of low income will not be deemed status worthy. As a result, these individuals may abandon this status norm, along with accompanying work
ethics, and engage in other forms of status seeking" (p. 728).

[8] Tellis-Nayak (1983) puts forward a particularly accurate definition of the patron-client bond as "an asymmetrical, voluntary, and instrumental friendship in which noncomparable goods and services are exchanged for mutual benefit" (p. 67). Physical protection entailing violent action can perfectly be one of the services offered by the client to his patron.

Weinstein's rationale and predictions are synthesised in table 1 below. Note that, to Weinstein, the recruitment policy pattern strongly affects the organisational cohesiveness of the rebellion: monetary-based enlistment is assumed to entail weaker commitment than ideology- or social capital-based militancy. As a consequence, rebellions built upon strong non economic bonds are likely to last longer than purely predatory movements. This might logically affect the duration of civil wars and provides a basis for a normative reflection.

Table 1: Weinstein's model's rationale and predictions

Rebellion's financial constraint - Availability of resources (lootable or not)	Type of rewards offered to rank and file militants	Predicted type of recruits	Most likely observable militants profiles	organisational outcome
Yes	Immediate cash	High discount rate	Lumpen youth	Low commitment – unstable organisation
No	Promises of pecuniary and non pecuniary rewards	Low discount rate	Educated youth	High commitment – cohesive organisation

Weinstein provides an apparently consistent and micro founded framework to analyse the variety of violent mobilisation processes in civil wars'. Our next section will use it as a basis for interpreting our empirical observations. One should however make several comments beforehand. Firstly, whether patience (i.e., in technically terms, time discount rate) is an individual characteristic or not is a highly debatable issue. Anthropological research by Bourdieu (1977) or Meillassoux (1992), for example, have at length and convincingly argued that the perception of time an individual may have is socially constructed. It differs, Bourdieu argues, according to the material context and the economic regime one is embedded in. Typically traditional rural economies rely on the repetition of the same agricultural cycles and imply short-term time horizons whereas industrial economies are based on long-term investment. Both attitudes towards time are not innate; they stem from processes of learning. Varying time discount rates across individuals might capture social as well as individual differences. Time discount rate can then hardly be considered as the ultimate driver behind individuals' behaviours. Secondly, the level education doesn't necessarily constitute a good proxy for "patience": it is a parental decision rather than an individual decision; non-optimal educational choices are frequently due to economic constraints (Baland and Robinson (2000)); and educational choices largely depend on imperfect anticipations of the returns to education. Observed levels of education depend on many other factors than mere "patience". Reducing educational choices to varying degrees of patience and thus proxying discount rates by education is particularly simplistic. Again the role that Weinstein grants to education overlooks social phenomena (socially differentiated access to credit, heterogeneous abilities to anticipate the returns to education, heterogeneous households dispositions towards and beliefs about education etc.). To conclude, although Weinstein's classification of rebellions seems to hold empirically, the attempt to bridge its two polar cases remains weak analytically. To illustrate this point, one can perfectly imagine that a high proportion of well-educated youths enlisted in violent movements first and foremost reflects the frustration of disappointed social expectations among students rather than merely patience combined with ideological brainwashing. Côte d'Ivoire's current President's supporters (self branded "Young Patriots") could well fit this kind of explanation as suggested by several monographs (Konate (2003)): his hardcore militants all come from Abidjan's main campus, Cocody, and were formerly Student Union militants fearing social downgrading following the severe structural adjustment

era. Similar processes could perfectly be at play in Nigeria where university degree holders also face high levels of unemployment (Dabalen and Obi (2000)).

We now turn to some fieldwork results on one of Nigeria's major ethnic militias, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC). We will successively look at the Nigerian context, the history and nature of OPC's activities before addressing the issues of the profiles of militia members more specifically.

3. Ethnic militias in Nigeria

Scholars studying conflicts could classify Nigeria as one of the most challenging terrains in which to confront various conflict-related theories. Nigeria combines most of the features significantly raising the probability of conflict listed by Collier and Hoeffler (Collier and Hoeffler (1998); (2002)). It is a poor country; it has large reserves of natural resources and is ethnically diverse. The Biafran war, stemming from an attempt by south-eastern Nigeria to secede from the national community, is the worst violent civil war that Nigeria has experienced so far, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. But still today, Nigeria regularly witnesses large-scale episodes of violence, although not as serious as the Biafran war. Recent episodes of violence include herdsmen/farmers clashes in the Plateau or Oyo States, sabotage operations and battles between official forces and secessionist militias in the oil-producing area of the Niger Delta or communal conflicts in urbanised neighbourhoods of the economic capital Lagos. Interestingly, self-proclaimed ethnic militias openly operate as non "legal" perpetrators of violence.

3.1. Political Instability and militias in Nigeria

In 2003, Nigeria was the fifth largest OPEC oil producer. Oil is estimated to represent 70 percent of the government's federal revenue, 98 percent of export earnings and 40 percent of the country's GDP (Bach (2004); Mustapha (2002)). However, Nigerians are among the poorest in the world. Around 70 percent of the population today live on less than one dollar a day. Life expectancy at birth hardly reaches 52 years. 44 percent of the young men aged between 20 and 24 are unemployed (National Population Commission (2000)). For decades now, Nigeria has been struggling with its "national question", consisting of bringing together its extremely diverse linguistic, ethnic and religious constituents. Demographically, three "majority" groups account for 50 per cent of the country's inhabitants: the Hausa-Fulani (mostly living in the North), the Yoruba (Southwest) and the Igbo (East). "Minority" groups are particularly present in the Middle Belt (like the Tiv) or in the coastal Niger Delta region (like the Ijaw). Despite this cultural diversity, "the tendency of many minority groups to cluster – politically, linguistically and culturally - round the big three, has given Nigeria a tripolar ethnic structure which forms the main context for ethnic mobilization and contestation" (Mustapha (2004), p. 4). The population in the North is mainly Muslim while the South is mainly Christian. These ethno-religious fault lines coincide with strong economic and social imbalances. Industrial infrastructure, including the oil production complex, is concentrated in the South.

At the political level, military regimes have ruled the country most of the time since independence. Democracy was introduced in 1999 but hasn't wiped out three decades of dictatorial rule and corrupt practices. Nigeria is rated the 2nd most corrupt country in the world by the NGO Transparency International. Its dismal political situation reached a climax in the late nineties, during the infamous "Abacha years". Repressive governing methods and opaque management of the oil rent have certainly not contributed to foster harmonious political and redistributive institutions in

the country, despite its official federal nature. Since the Biafran war, considerable efforts have been made to achieve national cohesiveness, by creating new decentralised administrative units (Bach (1988); (2004)) or entrenching cultural pluralism in the Constitution - for example through the "Federal Character Principle"[9]. However, these have not been entirely successful and have induced many perverse effects. Indeed, the country's protracted political instability can be interpreted as an outcome of the particular kind of political competition provoked by the centralised management of the oil revenues which transforms each tier of the Federation into indebted clients of the Centre. Nigerian representatives of States and Local Governments whose resources are almost exclusively derived from transfers from the "Federation Account" tend to turn their eyes exclusively towards the Federal Government disregarding the social and economic aspirations of their local constituencies. This "representation without taxation" effect (Guyer (1994)) deprives the citizenry of any lever of pressure on their local political class. Even worse, the citizenry can easily become the instrument of the ruling class in the central negotiation over the oil revenue sharing formula[10]. This might explain the great propensity of Nigerian leaders to adopt ethnic politics as mobilisation techniques (e.g. denouncing marginalisation, a leitmotiv in Nigerian politicians' discourses).

As a corollary to this peculiar political setting many armed groups have flourished helping to grant credibility to the claims and threats addressed by various sections of Nigerian society to the Centre. Actually, each of the three major ethnic groups has its militia, though varying in their respective history, goals and present actions: the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) is supposed to defend the interests of the Yoruba; the Arewa People's Congress stands for the defence of the Hausa-Fulani and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra demands secession for the Igboland[11].

These groups express claims on the national political scene but also derive their success from more local stakes. They constitute privileged partners for political figures as well, as they might help securing personal political upgrading. During elections periods, armed groups have solid arguments to convince the voters to choose the politician they are engaged with (Gore and Pratten (2003); Nolte (2004)). Also, as will be shown below, militias have managed to create a great deal of popular legitimacy and economic sustainability by providing services abandoned by the governmental authorities, notably crime-fighting operations.

We will now turn to the direct observation of one of these paramilitary groups, the OPC.

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[9] The Federal Character Principle requiring that "the composition of the Federal Government, of any of its agencies and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to recognize the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty. Accordingly, the predominance in that Government or its agencies of persons from a few states, or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups shall be avoided" (Albert (2000), p. 71). In recent years, this innovative logic has been applied to an expanding set of issues such as the electoral rules or the allocation of University bursaries to students.

[10] The rationale behind the calculus of the share of the oil cake allocated to the various tiers of the Nigerian Federation is based on a combination of demographic, economic and social criteria mixed with a degree of « derivation principle ». The derivation principle stipulates that localities should enjoy the revenues generated on their soil. It is only very partially implemented in Nigeria and its appropriate scope is constantly contested by the oil producing states. The oil revenue sharing formula also renders the population counts a highly sensitive issue.

[11] The groups quoted are the major ones in each cultural area, but definitely not the sole ones.

3.2. A Methodological note

The ultimate goal of our empirical investigation was to reach OPC's rank and file militants and administer to them a questionnaire about their profiles, life histories, motives and activities. Before this stage of the fieldwork was implemented literature reviews, press overviews, open-ended interviews were necessary to acquire prior knowledge of the militia, its history, its objectives and its activities. Members of the OPC, positioned at different levels of its internal hierarchy were interviewed. Meetings were organised in Lagos separately with Gani Adams and Frederick Fasehun, OPC's two factional leaders (see details below). State level officers from both factions, based in the second largest city of the country, Ibadan (Oyo State), were encountered on several occasions during which "zonal coordinators" were also present. We attended one of the weekly zonal meetings of a "sister-group" of OPC, the Federation of Yoruba Culture and Consciousness (FYCC) and had collective discussions with its participants. Finally, external observers of the OPC, some very close to its political or ideological positions, were interviewed, including scholars (University of Ibadan), human rights activists (from the Campaign for Democracy, or the Civil Liberties Organisation) and a students' leader (University of Ibadan).

These various contacts helped in designing a sampling strategy towards the interviews of grassroots militants. Practically, it is difficult to get in touch with the militia members, not because they want to keep their activities secret but because identifying them and obtaining their agreement to answer questions in a cost-effective way is far from straightforward. Ethical and safety concerns also meant that the field work strategy was quite time-consuming. Basically, the initial strategy implemented consisted of following the chain of command and obtaining clearance at each hierarchical level[12] to ensure sufficient communication and transparency of the research intentions. Questionnaires were handed in to factional leaders before the actual survey took place and were accepted as such. (Naïve) attempts were made to obtain lists of local leaders and their groups' members. Unsurprisingly, this objective was not achieved but formal clearance was granted to carry out the survey[13]. In the end, personal contacts with local intermediaries in Ibadan and Lagos (the two largest cities of the "Yorubaland") proved to be the most efficient route to gain access to the lowest but decisive level of authority within the movement: the zonal coordinator level. Zonal coordinators, and only they, could grant access to the rank and file members. This hardly foreseeable "trial and error" method led to one important conclusion at least: despite regular contacts between all tiers of the organisational hierarchy, the activities and the supervision of the grassroots followers depend almost entirely on their immediate superior. OPC's structure gives large margins of manoeuvre to its local representatives.

[12] OPC's national headquarters are based in Lagos where the two factional leaders reside. The organisation has delegates at the state level and the local government level. Each local government is divided into zones led by a "zonal coordinator". The number of zones per local government depends on the number of grassroots affiliates. New zones emerge as outgrows of existing zones: when the number of militants from one zone roughly reaches 50, a new zone can be created and a new zonal coordinator appointed, godfathered by the initial coordinator.

[13] Centralised lists of members probably exist but might not be exhaustive. After filling in a form, experienced members are issued a plastic card by the national headquarters. This card mentions their name, their hierarchical rank and displays an id picture. New members have to be patient before getting this card. This delay prevents people from joining "only for the card" (interview with a Lagos Island zonal coordinator)

Finally, 168 OPC members from Lagos and Ibadan belonging to 9 zones (see table 2) were administered a questionnaire asking about their socio-economic profiles, their life histories, the process through which they were recruited, their motives, and the duties and the possible gains associated with militia membership. It is obvious that questioning people on matters such as their participation in violent actions tends to trigger answers very likely to downplay and embellish reality. The author is conscious of this potential bias. However, efforts were made to minimise this risk: firstly, constant attempts were made to interview all the members of a zone and to avoid interacting with the movement's "gatekeepers" only; secondly, as much as possible, interviews have been carried out face to face, in a discreet environment; finally, interviews were administered by experienced research assistants, with a perfect knowledge of the areas surveyed and, consequently difficult to deceive.

Table 2: Sample structure

Zone	Faction	Freq.
Lagos Island	Gani	38
Ibadan North 1	FYCC	15
Ibadan North 2	FYCC	14
Ibadan North 1	Gani	7
Ibadan North 2	Gani	7
Ibadan North 3	Gani	16
Ibadan North 4	Gani	9
Ibadan North 5	Gani	36
Ibadan South East	Gani	25
Total		**167**

It was impossible to access zones belonging to the Fasehun faction, largely because our contact in Ibadan proved unreliable but also, possibly, because the Fasehun faction lost prominence and influence at the rank and file level. We attempted to interview all the members in each accessible zone. In practice, we interviewed members attending weekly group meetings regularly, i.e. the most active members. This is where the originality of the survey largely lies: people that were interviewed were active members. By definition, surveys focusing on former combatants (like that instigated by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004)) cannot be addressed to those who lost their life in combat. We don't face this kind of bias. But conversely, as violence is of a mild degree (see below) – which is the condition *sine qua non* of feasibility of the survey – we have no certainty that all our respondents would be ready to participate in large-scale massacres, vast looting operations, or real civil wars. A greater intensity of violence might deter some of the militia members from continuing with militancy and self-select other individual profiles.

The main weakness of the survey at this stage is that it cannot tell accurately how different its respondents are from the rest of the population, as no control group of non militia members was interviewed. The present paper's intention is to portray current OPC's grassroots followers. However, when possible, we compare our statistical findings with existing, though rough, figures on the overall population, so as to give some idea of differences with the general population.

Before turning to this, we briefly present the OPC's origins, goals and activities. Paying attention to the organisation itself is actually an analytical prerequisite: individuals don't freely self-select into any collective, *a fortiori* when this collective is deliberately engaged in violent operations. As argued by Fearon and Laitin (2000), each collective has rules with which members have to comply. These rules help

screening candidates, thus making the specific organisational investigation crucial. They are at least of two sorts: membership rules deciding who should become an insider and behavioural rules specifying members' dos and don'ts. Each rebel organisation has its own definition of what a "good soldier" is, which is more or less enacted by those within the organisation undertaking the actual recruitment. Typically, initiation rites constitute techniques designed to enhance obedience to the collective's prescribed behaviours. *Ex ante*, they might help deter candidates not compatible enough with the collective's internal regulations.

3.3. The Oodua People's Congress

3.3.1 The OPC's origins and its "criminal" shift

The Oodua People's Congress, named after the mythological ancestor of the Yoruba, is one of the largest ethnic militias in today's Nigeria. It is very influential in the states demographically dominated by the Yoruba in the Southwest. The OPC's official objectives are set out in its constitution. The OPC's objectives are "to identify with our historical and cultural origin with a view to re-living the glory of our past for the purpose of posterity; to educate and mobilize the descendants of Oduduwa for the purpose of the above; to integrate the aspirations and values of all the descendants of Oduduwa into a collective platform of an Oodua entity; to monitor the various interests of descendants of Oduduwa […] and struggle for the protection of these interests; […] to further the progress of Oodua civilization by protection and promoting our value, mores and the inter-generational transmission of same" (quoted in Human Rights Watch (2003), p. 4). One of OPC's main claims is the organisation of a Sovereign National Conference designed to redraw the rules of the Federation.

Today's OPC claims to have several millions members spread worldwide[14]. The main bulk of these supporters obviously concentrate in the heart of the Yorubaland, mainly consisting of the six states of the former South-western region (Lagos, Edo, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ondo) plus the States of Kwara and Kogi. Other supporters live in the Yoruba part of the Republic of Bénin or belong to the Diaspora in North America or Europe. Whether these members are card-carrying members regularly attending meetings or mere sympathisers occasionally contributing to the activities of the group is unverifiable as is the relative weights of each faction and the proportion of "esos" (i.e. its best trained "soldiers") in the groups[15]. What is sure however is that OPC can be labelled a mass movement, known by everyone in Nigeria.

The OPC was created under very specific circumstances characterised by frustrated promises of democratic transition and fierce repression of political opposition, under the most corrupt post-independence military rule Nigeria has ever known. Interestingly, its founder Frederick Fasehun, a prosperous medical doctor, was known to be a human rights activist before becoming an ethnic leader. To him, this shift of ideological focus was self-imposed. It stemmed from his personal utter

[14] In 2003, the Gani Adams faction claims to have enlisted 4.8 millions members but we have no possibility to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of this figure. The OPC leaders entertain the confusion on the size of their support. Theoretically, every adult Yoruba is entitled to be a member. Quite roughly and simplistically one can propose the following calculus to estimate the number of supporters in the sole Oyo State, where Ibadan is located: in Oyo State, the alleged number of OPC zones is 500. If we consider 30 as the average number of affiliates per zone, then Oyo State Gani Adams' "labour force" amounts to 15 000 individuals.

[15] To Gani Adams, his faction is only composed of 3 per cent of "esos", whose duties consist of ensuring security of those attending the cultural festivals or demonstrations organised by the group.

conviction that the ruling Northern military elite would never hand over power to civilians after it annulled the "June, 12" elections in 1993. These elections were supposed to put an end to the military era. Moshood Abiola, a rich Yoruba probably came first in the ballot but never enjoyed his victory as the military regime promptly annulled the vote, creating a tremendous trauma among Nigerians and, particularly the Yoruba. In the aftermath of the annulment, the fierce dictatorship of Sani Abacha, the military ruler who overthrew the Interim National Government installed by Babangida after the elections, led many human rights activists and democrats - often Yoruba from the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) to which Fasehun belonged -, to clandestine life. Many among them got killed. Fasehun's rhetoric then clearly took a racialist turn. Defending the Yoruba "race" became a matter of survival against the hegemonic ambitions of the Northerners:

> "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 (Fasehun (2002), p. 147)

The OPC was created in August 1994, apparently godfathered by prominent Yoruba political and cultural figures[16]. In December 1996, Fasehun was incarcerated. This changed the nature of the movement: « OPC became a violent organisation in 1996 after its founder […] was thrown into detention by the Abacha military junta. This incident made the OPC members feel that the Nigerian problems could not be solved peacefully » (Albert (2001), p. 282). Three more years were needed to actually witness serious violence perpetrated by the OPC, during which the organisation managed to rally troops with a remarkable rapidity. By itself, this sudden success tells a lot: it wouldn't have been possible without the activation of already existing networks and social structures: those organised around the initial prominent godfathers but also more official ones such as professional associations (e.g. transport workers unions). The OPC did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but was built up on firm social grounds present in the Yoruba society[17].

Most of the observers and actors of the OPC (Akinyele (2001), Human Rights Watch (2003) and personal communications with OPC leaders and sympathisers) consider that the year 1999 was a turning point in the history of the movement: the OPC became involved in multiple gruesome clashes against other ethnic groups, the police or alleged criminal gangs (Human Rights Watch (2003); Okechukwu (2000); Akinyele (2001)). The various confrontations are said to have claimed hundreds of lives. This shift in OPC's attitude coincides with i) the end of the military regime and the appointment of a Yoruba President certainly weakening the legitimacy of OPC's core argument of Yoruba marginalisation; ii) an alleged upsurge of criminal violence progressively transforming the OPC into a self-defence movement and, crucially, iii) the rise of young and charismatic challenger to Fasehun's hold on the OPC: Gani Adams. The OPC broke up into two factions in the beginning of 1999[18]. Gani Adams

[16] Among them, Fasehun cites the human rights activist Beko Ransome-Kuti from Campaign for Democracy, Chief Michael Adekunke Ajasin (leader of NADECO and head of Afenifere, a respected Yoruba elite group claiming the legacy of Awolowo), or Chief Bola Ige (future Attorney General and Minister of Justice under the democratic rule, after 1999). Beko Ransome-Kuti, Bola Ige and Afenifere, though not bearing the flag of OPC, later maintained close links with the movement.

[17] I am grateful to Dr. Said Adejumobi for pointing out this important observation.

[18] A wide range of explanations of the factionalisation of the OPC circulate. A reciprocal accusation concerns the alleged political connections established by each of the leaders independently. Fasehun is blamed for having supported one of the two Yoruba candidates to

became the radical flag bearer of a generation which was largely denied the chance of pursuing much education, a role that Fasehun could not hold[19]. Very importantly, while Fasehun seemingly considered that OPC inflammable youths "able to flex their muscles" should remain under the control of educated leaders[20], Gani Adams' perspective on what a good OPC member is much closer to the "loose molecule" type presented above:

> "We don't like to bother ourselves with people from a capitalist background or rich people because they can only behave like sympathisers to the struggle and can be difficult to be devoted member. The real people are the frustrated people on the street who are deprived one way or the other. They have the will and courage to fight. For instance, take the student union movement, children of rich people do not bother to join such movement to fight for their rights, it is only student from deprived homes who are often at the forefront of the battle." (interview with Gani Adams[21], 23/05/05)

Gani Adams' OPC has the same political goals as Fasehun's. The shift is organisational rather than political or ideological (Adams (2003)). Gani Adams' new philosophy in recruitment is said to have provoked the partial progressive criminalisation of the OPC. As explained by one of our informants from the Gani Adams' faction in Oyo State:

> "When we started, we called ourselves youth activist but when the then military started dealing with us, that they killed about 300 at Mushin [a popular neighbourhood of Lagos], then we went back to recruit all sorts of people, area boys [=quasi-criminal street boys] and any kind of person that was interested. This, to me, led to the loss of focus of the organization leading to the derailing of its initial plans" (interview with S., 4/03/04)

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the presidential election, Olua Falae while Fasehun accuses Gani Adams to be the puppet of another populist Yoruba leader, Gani Fawehinmi.

[19] "This Fasehun who is calling me illiterate went through free education. If I had a chance of free education, you know what I could have been now? I could be a Ph.D. in political science, but I came from a very poor family" (Maier (2002), p. 241).

[20] Personal communication with Frederick Fasehun (02/05/06 and 1/09/06). Fasehun never considered OPC as a non-violent organisation but, to him, violence should always be guided by reason. He considers Gani Adams' background with an extreme contempt: "his educational deficiencies would have prevented him from immediately vividly absorbing the operating philosophy behind OPC. This philosophy was not vivid to many literate minds let alone a mind not primed by formal schooling for the power of reason, as guaranteed by prior knowledge of class-taught history or socio-political experiences or basic information of the economy and the legal implications" (Fasehun (2005), p. 26)

[21] For a detailed account on Gani Adams' ideological discourse, see Adebanwi (2005).

3.3.2 The OPC's (lucrative) activities

In 1999, vigilantism became one of OPC's main activities[22]. OPC's reliance on magical techniques and beliefs, deeply entrenched in Yoruba society (Nolte (2004); Williams (1980)) gave them a substantial comparative advantage for this kind of activity[23]. Importantly, OPC's services, primarily targeted at poor communities are also more affordable than formal private security outfits. When recruited, new OPC members take an oath making them bullet-proof and compelling them not to commit any criminal offence. Apart from raising self-confidence among the members, these techniques certainly ensure cohesiveness within the group as violating the oath may have very serious consequences for the culprit. Simultaneously, the alleged command of OPC of magical practices provokes fear in OPC's potential enemies' minds and renders its actions credible within the population they are supposed to serve. This magical equipment is complemented by more "classical" weaponry: some OPC members (certainly not all) carry guns, locally produced, smuggled or robbed from police stores. Retired policemen or militaries offer them training sessions in "self-defence", "in the bush" (Akinyele (2001), Human Rights Watch (2003)).

Criminality was and is a huge concern in many parts of the Yorubaland. The police are highly distrusted, for their passiveness, their corruption[24] and propensity to overreact when they actually intervene (Albert, Awe, Hérault, and Omitoogun (1995)). In cities, the proliferation of gated communities (Fabiyi (2004)) makes the security business extremely lucrative. The OPC has established strong positions in this sector, probably to improve its image,[25] but certainly also to address a genuine demand expressed by the population. To a certain extent, the OPC is the police that poor people can rely on. Vigilantism is combined with crime-fighting activities. OPC members claim to chase armed robbers in zones that policemen are scared to enter. Whether they systematically hand over the suspects to the police is unclear. Some instances of cooperation with the police have been reported to us but we have also been told a different story:

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[22] Many consider in Nigeria that 1999 was a year of particularly high criminal violence. This wave of crime is said to stem from the return of the military to the barracks. A serious Lagos based NGO, CLEEN, provides crime statistics that challenge that view: reports of criminal offences in the year 2000 are lower than the preceding and following years (cf. http://www.cleen.org/crime%20statistics%201994-2003_graphics.pdf)! As admitted by those who collected the data, these figures might not be exact due to the poor reliability and incompleteness of police reports (state authorities don't have systematically submitted their crime statistics when national data are issued). Victimisation surveys are said to capture more accurately the phenomenon of criminal activity. A recent survey by the same NGO reports strong feelings of physical insecurity among the Lagosians. Almost half of the interviewees spread all over Lagos say they resort to formal or informal vigilantism to protect their neighbourhood (Alemika and Chukwuma (2005)).

[23] This comparative advantage is expressed by one of our informants in a more prosaic way: "It is only the robber who can identify a robber […]. We are with them, we are at the lower level so we know them". The same interviewee, though not dismissing the reality of magic powers, ironically admits that what urban dwellers consider as magic is the mere result of close and patient observation of suspected local criminals by a tight network of discreet informants.

[24] According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2005)'s victimisation survey, 59 per cent of the Lagosians interviewed were stopped by the police in the year preceding the survey. 30 per cent of those stopped "were allowed to continue their movement without further action, but 68 per cent said they had to give money to the police to avoid getting into trouble" (p. 31).

[25] "OPC started crime fighting activities when the police started giving them bad name, that they were rogues and, in order to change their image, they started protecting lives and properties especially of the Yorubas." (interview with M. E., 3/03/05).

> "once we arrest criminals, we kill them because such person is dangerous to live within the society and again the police are not reliable because you could find out that the criminal you gave them is released the next day" (interview with H., zonal coordinator, 26/05/05, Ibadan)[26]

> "sometimes we light [armed robbers] up, sometimes we hand them over to the police, but what make us not to hand over many of them to the police is the fearness of our life because someone you hand over to the police […] will be looking for that person that hand over him to police" (interview with C., zonal coordinator, 9/12/2005, Lagos).

The judiciary's reputation is not better than the police's. Long written formal procedures are another obstacle leading often illiterate people to prefer alternative "traditional" routes of dispute settling. OPC has gained some legitimacy in this sector too. It intervenes probably at a level where existing informal mechanisms[27] have failed. The OPC can arbitrate landlord/tenants issues (Okechukwu (2000)) or operate as a debt collector (especially when one of the parties is non-Yoruba). It has also been reported to defend the interests of workers threatened by dismissal (Omole (2005)). One of our informants, known for his substantial knowledge of magic (*juju*), has been appointed by his group as a "patron" in charge of mediating in conflicts in the Ibadan-North local government. Importantly, the insertion of the OPC as an informal actor regulating Yoruba society has been facilitated by the identity of its local leaders who generally share many other affiliations as members of traditional secret societies called *oro* (Nolte, I. (2004)), or members of labour unions[28]. Through the personal networks of its members, the OPC is enmeshed with many other organisations of informal social regulation. Locally, its success certainly lies in its ability to bridge gaps between these organisations and to ensure the delivery of "public services" in areas completely abandoned by formal institutions. In this respect, OPC might simply be a modern version of old community self-defence practices that emerged long ago following Nigeria's urbanisation (Fourchard (2006); Sesay, Ukeje, Aina, and Odebiyi (2003)).

[26] Mob justice is by no means the monopoly of the OPC. It is a widespread phenomenon in Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa (on Nigeria, see Harnischfeger (2003); Human Rights Watch (2002)).

[27] In the Yoruba society, a whole hierarchy of informal dispute settling mechanisms can be seized by conflicting parties, from the household level to the city level (Albert, Awe, Hérault, and Omitoogun (1995)).

[28] In Ibadan, the headquarters of the OPC are located in the same building as the National Union of Transport Workers and the leaders of the two groups are close relatives. Nolte (2004) notes a similar proximity between the two organisations in another Yoruba town, Remo.

Table 3: Militia members' activities

Average number of hours devoted to the militia per week	7
Type of training received (per cent of yes)	
use of traditional means of protection	*96*
unarmed combat	*90*
armed combat	*78*
Activities (per cent of yes)	
participation in cultural meetings (festivals)	*92*
political discussions	*83*
spiritual activities	*74*
political demonstrations	*32*
crime-fighting operations	*88*
security	*82*
actions against other groups	*60*

The "services" offered by the OPC are not free. But quantifying their "prices" is a difficult task. Transfers sometimes happen in kind and transactions may occur in bulk. Moreover the payment and the delivery of "services" don't necessarily coincide temporally. The OPC "recommends" vigilantes in its areas of influence, hands back to his/her owner the loot of apprehended robbers or arbitrates local disputes. Prices may not be systematically formally set for these services; they may also depend on the social status of the parties to the transaction. But the beneficiaries are certainly willing to pay something to the OPC, not only for the delivery of services but also for the fear of reprisal if they fail to do so. The OPC's protective and stabilising role roots its success in the capacity of the organisation to maintain a certain degree of distrust and instability within the communities where it operates, as shown in other contexts by Gambetta (2000).

A final but crucial aspect of the OPC's multifaceted activities is its instrumentalisation by local politicians resulting in new potential for tensions and a rise of economic opportunities[29]. The OPC is popular among the youths and inspires fear among local communities. Consequently, it becomes the perfect mobilising tool for local politicians. Several instances of the manipulation of the OPC for political purposes have been observed at different political levels (Human Rights Watch (2003); Okechukwu (2000)). This is neither particularly recent nor exceptional in the Nigerian (and African) political landscape where the youths have regularly been used as a strong tool for rallying electoral troops (Gore and Pratten (2003); Nolte (2004); Anderson (2002)).

To conclude this section, the OPC is the complex outcome of ethnic politics, mundane concerns for local supremacy and a genuine popular desire for protection against criminality. Its ideological background primarily lies on the standard nationalistic argument denunciating collective "marginalisation". Vigilantism and proximity to politicians constitute two lucrative opportunities for the organisation that might attract followers. Interestingly, OPC's history shows a major organisational shift, accompanied by violent action, towards what could be considered as

[29] "Yes, there is a lot of economic gains for [the OPC] now that politicians are around now, they use them as machineries for political violence" (interview with M. E., 03/03/05, Ibadan).

immediately cash rewarding actions such as vigilantism or deals with politicians. The same movement may thus have witnessed sequentially the two states described above by Weinstein as two alternative forms of militias, respectively driven by ideological and materialist concerns. Looking in more detail at militia members' profiles will help to assess the heuristic value of this analytical framework.

4. Militia Grassroots Militants' Profiles and Motives

4.1. Socio-economic profiles of militants: is the loose molecule hypothesis sustained by empirical evidence?

Following from the above statements on the organisational evolution of the OPC, one would expect the movement to attract mainly "loose molecules". Is this empirically true? The OPC members surveyed are 31 years old on average. They are overwhelmingly male (90 per cent). Women are welcome however. They are granted a specific role in the internal division of labour: they are prohibited from performing "night operations" (like vigilantism) but serve as privileged informants or "spies" in the struggle against crime. 80 per cent of the militia members that were interviewed were Muslims. This figure is surprisingly high as the Southwest of Nigeria is said to be predominantly Christian[30]. It shows however that the fight against the Northerners' alleged hegemonic ambitions is deployed along ethnic lines only. It is orthogonal to religious affiliations as "Northerners" are almost exclusively Muslims, too.

Levels of education, occupations (table 4) and social connectedness are the most telling indicators in assessing the loose molecule hypothesis. Results are striking: OPC members are relatively well-educated people; their educational achievement is slightly above that of the general South-western male population surveyed in National Population Commission and Macro (2004). In addition, almost none of them are jobless and they earn on average USD 27 (far above the absolute poverty line). If not extremely deprived economically however, OPC rank and file militants face the typical economic vulnerability inherent with informal sector activities where more than 80 per cent of them operate.

[30] An hypothesis could be that the type of Islam prevailing in the Yorubaland is more compatible with traditional practices than the teaching of the dominant Churches of South West Nigeria which dismisses traditional practices.

Table 4: Indicators of human capital and economic integration of OPC militants

Level of education (per cent)	
no school	*2*
some primary	*10*
primary completed	*25*
some secondary	*26*
secondary completed	*28*
above secondary	*8*
other	*1*
Occupation (per cent)	
jobless	*1*
student	*9*
unpaid employee	*3*
unprotected paid employee	*10*
self employed – trader	*61*
self employed – artisan	*14*
civil servant	*1*
other	*1*
Average weekly income (naira)	3470

In terms of social integration, OPC members definitely do not look like faithless and lawless individuals. A vast majority of them are married, have children (sometimes out of wedlock) and are settled in places they rent[31]. Members don't hide their affiliation to OPC. It is public knowledge in the neighbourhood where they live for almost 70 per cent of them.

Table 5: Indicators of social integration of militants

	per cent
Proportion of married members	64
Proportion of members with children	69
Proportion of members renting their own housing unit	64
Do people in your neighbourhood know you're a militia member (per cent of yes)	68

Both in economic and social terms, OPC members have rather ordinary people profiles. Their opportunity cost of joining is far from nil – even if it is lessened by the fact that being a militia member is not a full-time activity (see table 2 above). As a result, the militia rank and file members we interviewed shouldn't be theoretically particularly motivated to join for purely economic motives. Their subjective reasons for doing so (i.e. those they have explicitly expressed) and the processes through which they have been recruited are reported below. They both contribute to capture what determines enlistment in militias.

[31] One could contest this statement by suggesting that members may currently have parallel unobservable more "illegal" activities or that they may have carried out criminal activities in the past. For obvious reason, this possibility is hardly verifiable through structured interviews. In some specific instances, though - and particularly in Lagos -, it seems clear that some of the interviewees do have a criminal record. One of the women interviewed is almost certainly a sex worker while another male interviewee has admitted having been imprisoned several times. However, this perfect "thug-profile" doesn't at all represent the majority of the people interviewed.

4.2. Subjective motives of ethnic militancy: the desire for protection

As mentioned above, in the absence of a control group, one cannot precisely assess the salience of the various reasons leading to militia enlistment. One can however categorise them and spot whether they have played a role in gaining membership. Table 5 synthesises the answers provided to motive-related and recruitment-related questions.

Table 6: Enlistment motives and recruitment processes

When joining the militia, did you expect that your new situation could… (per cent)	
facilitate your access to cash	*11*
increase your chances to get a new/better job	*17*
facilitate your contacts with opp. 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? (per cent)	
a personal event	*19*
a political event	*15*
Difference between the militia and other political or cultural organisations (per cent)	
well-organised	19
neat behaviour	65
political project	29
better for business	4
more protective	41
Channels of recruitment (per cent)	
friends, neighbours	*60*
patronage	*22*
spontaneous application	*18*

Immediate economic reasons (access to cash, better job) are expressed in less than one case out of five. The most frequent answer overwhelmingly refers to the desire of protection. As mentioned above, the OPC is reputed to have command of magical practices, able to secure economic prosperity, good health, social success and, maybe above all, protection against enemies. In short, what makes people apply to OPC membership is the perception of a risk on their life or property. This is confirmed by individual reports, mentioning, for example, the "fear of unknown future" as an impetus for affiliation. The anxiety motivating the enlistment is also somehow present in the respondents' justifications of their choice of group to belong to: a large majority of them acclaim OPC's "neat behaviour", i.e. the fact that, unlike political parties, the organisation "doesn't cheat" its members. OPC is viewed as a caring group for its rank and file, ready to help if there is any problem. It is expected to have a direct and immediate local beneficial impact on its members' well-being. Among the many positive characteristics of OPC quoted by respondents are: "solidarity[32]", "oneness", "togetherness" etc. All these expressions carry a heavy connotation of protection.

The desire to be protected might stem from quite objective circumstances. One of the zones surveyed in Ibadan is entirely composed of butchers with whom OPC has a formal security arrangement. In this particular case, any butcher is, in a sense, compelled to join to have his business secured in this way. Here, the actual volition of the members to join is rather equivocal as the traders might suffer menaces and even reprisals if they don't pay their dues to the militia.

[32] "Solidarity for ever" is the group motto, chanted repetitively during meetings.

Note also that OPC is also perceived as a facilitator of status promotion by many, in line with the "cognitive dissonance" argument mentioned above: almost 45 per cent of the respondents expect that joining OPC will improve the personal respect they enjoy in their neighbourhood.

Internal deliberations, perceptions and expectations might not suffice to bring about enlistment. Social connections within the movement might also be decisive. Less than one out of five respondents spontaneously applied to OPC. The rest were influenced by peers and patrons (often already members). An individual case particularly exemplifies the combination of the desire for protection and the personal contacts from which enlistment derives: a 32 year old woman explains:

> "I wanted protection for myself and my children. Since there was no father to come to their aid, the best option for me is to join the movement to get protection and security from hoodlums in my neighbourhood. It was [the zonal coordinator] that helped on this issue".

4.3. Actual gains: a protected sphere of economic exchanges, assistance and subjective well-being

A look at the immediate actual gains obtained through militia membership (table 6) confirms the above results. It shows that protection and assistance are provided in effect by the OPC. This protection is symbolic or spiritual (*jujus*) and material (cash in case of injury, illness or other unfortunate personal event). Along with this temporary kind of assistance when members suffer unexpected shocks, militia rank and file benefits from more regular assistance through continuous business relations. Therefore, the OPC is not only an informal insurance mechanism protecting against idiosyncratic risks, it is also a protected sphere of continuous economic exchanges.

Importantly, as shown in the table, to respondents this does not necessarily result in a tangible improvement of their economic situation but in a dramatic improvement of their sentiment of protection and psychological comfort. "Peace of mind", "rest of mind", "confidence" are very often quoted as major changes induced by membership.

Table 7: Material and non-material rewards of militia membership

Immediate rewards before or after operations (per cent)	
cash	*6*
food	*5*
non medical drugs / jujus	*76*
First source of assistance in case of problems (per cent)	
nobody	*3*
spouse / partner	*10*
parents	*23*
brothers / sisters	*4*
other relatives	*2*
local militia leaders	*8*
other militia members	*31*
non-militia friends	*11*
Militia as part of the first 4 sources of assistance (per cent)	63
Does the militia help in case of… (per cent of yes)	
injury in operation	*98*
illness	*99*
other urgent need	*99*
Proportion of members having business contacts with other members	63
What has the movement brought to your life (open-ended question, per cent)	
psychological comfort / behavioural improvement	*41*
no more problem	*10*
protection	*40*
better economic situation	*16*
nothing yet	*7*

4.4. The time-varying weight of the ideological motive

The above results tend to show that purely ideological motives for enlistment are less salient than mundane indirect materialistic or social prestige motives. As shown in table 6, only 31 per cent of the respondents thought that becoming an OPC member could expand their political awareness. This might result from the fact that they already felt politicised enough and thus doesn't rule out *per se* the possibility of an ideological enlistment. In fact, stressing the salience of non ideology-related motives doesn't entail being suspicious about their sincerity towards the OPC's political "cause". Undoubtedly, all respondents have espoused the Yoruba struggle. Typically, when prompted to tell the interviewer what OPC is, they, without hesitation, almost systematically put forward its collective objective ("promoting and protecting Yoruba interests in Nigeria"). The sincerity of their adhesion to this goal cannot be questioned. But as the statistical hierarchy of the answers provided in table 6 shows, ideological adherence to the organisation doesn't constitute an obstacle to the presence of other, much more diverse, considerations when joining. It might simply constitute a common primordial object of consensus among the militants, beyond which many other characteristics make the membership of the organisation desirable.

The coexistence of multiple sorts of motives might also be reflected by some degree of heterogeneity within our sample, in the line suggested by Weinstein. The group might be composed of – to simplify - two sorts of members expressing different sets of expectations. This is the hypothesis we are testing in this final section. In particular, to show the possibility of a greater political awareness in the early days of the movement, we divide the sample into two subgroups: namely those who joined the OPC under the military regime (before 1999) and those who joined the OPC after the inception of democracy (1999 and after). The inception of the Third Republic constitutes a major turning point in the Nigerian political history, likely to have deeply affected social attitudes toward militancy and popular claims, particularly among the Yoruba who, after the elections, had a kinsman, Olusegun Obasanjo, in charge of the country's destiny. We use standard mean comparison tests to see whether pre-democracy joiners differ systematically from post-democracy joiners in various respects. Two preliminary remarks must be made. First, we chose to compare individual characteristics that, as far as possible, don't change over time, in order to make sure that observed differences don't only reflect the "normal" course of time: pre-democracy joiners earn more money than post-democracy joiners but this might only reflect age differences and standard trajectories of earning patterns and accumulation of human capital. Second, the design of the survey doesn't account for those who left the movement: as a result, the early joiners still in the group today are likely to share more characteristics with the late joiners than with early joiners who then defected. As a result, the differences between today's active militants might be overlooked. Despite these caveats, clear differences are still observable between the two subgroups we have constructed that tend to strengthen the hypothesis of a shift of recruits' profiles, from "ideologues" toward more self-interested members. Results are shown in table 8 below.

Table 8: Have recruits profiles varied over years?

	Pre-democracy joiners (mean, n=42)	Post-democracy joiners (mean, n=125)	Mean differences
Education - more than primary educ	0.64	0.64	0.00
Role of political events ("June, 12")	0.31	0.01	0.30***
Spontaneous application	0.24	0.15	0.09
Expectations when joining			
Cash	0.05	0.14	-0.09**
Job	0.05	0.21	-0.16***
Sex	0.19	0.23	-0.04
Respect	0.45	0.46	-0.01
Powers	0.83	0.92	-0.09
Political awareness	0.33	0.30	0.03
Promises made when joining			
Political promises	0.22	0.20	0.02
Protection promises	0.14	0.40	-0.26***
Material promises	0.02	0.07	-0.05
Activities within OPC			
Cultural	0.90	0.87	0.03
Political discussions	0.76	0.74	0.02
Spiritual	0.62	0.58	0.04
Political demonstrations	0.29	0.17	0.08
Crime-fighting	0.90	0.77	0.13**
Security	0.71	0.69	0.02
Actions against other groups	0.59	0.46	0.13
What has OPC brought to your life?			
Psychological benefits	0.43	0.41	0.02
No more problem	0.10	0.10	0.00
Greater protection	0.52	0.36	0.16*
Better economic situation	0.05	0.20	-0.15***

***: significant at 99% of confidence
**: significant at 95% of confidence
*: significant at 90% of confidence

Here, differences are of greater importance than absolute figures. Unsurprisingly, the political context and the course of events at the moment of enlistment is more crucial for pre-democracy joiners. Particularly, the "June, 12" annulment, as referred to verbally by the respondents, has been a major trigger of the early wave of joiners. Similar mechanisms haven't been at play in the post-democracy era. Post-democracy enlistments don't seem to be attached to such a sudden event. Rather, they appear to be motivated by more self-interested considerations: post-democracy members mention direct or indirect material benefits (cash, jobs) as part of their motives in significantly higher proportions than their pre-democracy counterparts. They also tend to consider relatively more often that their membership had a positive impact on their economic situation - a dimension of membership which is almost absent from the reports of the pre-democracy joiners. The latter highlight their greater feeling of protection as a result of their membership. A final significant difference between the two strata of the OPC members of our sample can be observed: the participation in crime-fighting operations is more frequent among the early joiners. This might be explained by the hierarchical division of labour within the movement, likely to vary with seniority. The most senior members are perhaps more prone and more skilled to engage into this kind of activities. Although interpreting this last observation is not straightforward, the broad evidence shown by table 8 is unambiguous: profiles of militants change over time; the political shock of the inception of democracy introduced a cleavage among the followers. As early recruits instinctively joined after the "June, 12" annulment, those who got enlisted under the democratic regime pursued more explicitly self-interested goals.

5. Conclusion

The present paper has sought to examine empirically the various micro-level determinants of violent political mobilisation, using the case of a Nigerian ethnic militia. A major limitation of the survey is the absence of systematic comparison of the target group with the general population. But several important conclusions can be drawn from our observations.

Firstly, the purely materialistic vision of the loose molecule depicted in the conceptual discussion of the paper doesn't seem to hold. At least two other considerations are at play: first, the feeling of danger, the desire of protection against fuzzily identified risks (criminality, unknown future, menace from other ethnic groups etc.); second, the social proximity to insiders. In fact, vulnerability (either perceived or real) might be a more decisive factor of enlistment than poverty *per se*. The militia is perceived to be the most efficient organisation in providing assistance to its members. Enlistment into the militia then displays some similarity with the process described by Iannaccone and Berman (2006) who see sectarian movements as club goods providers: the lesser the provision of social services in the society at large, the greater the incentive to join groups providing those services only accessible to members. A puzzle remains however, which resides in the reason why the militia is better-equipped than other risk-mitigating collective arrangements like credit associations and, to some extent, churches. Answers may lie in the exceptionally strong enforcement mechanism that prevails within the organisation: immediate and very serious punishment will follow any defection. Traditional divinities on which oaths have been taken will hardly sanction bad behaviour. In support of this view, one should note that the most strongly inclusive Churches such as the Pentecostal don't appear in our sample. An additional lesson of this survey is that profiles of recruits probably differ according to the location of the enlistment, the identity of the local recruiter or the point of time when recruitment has taken place: for example, most of the members of the zone surveyed in Lagos were recruited through the network of personal allegiance of its coordinator whereas, as seen above, the members of an entire zone of Ibadan are the "beneficiaries" (and somehow also the victims) of an arrangement that looks like a business protection racket. More importantly, the respective weights of "ideologues" and self-interested members within the militia are affected by the political context. Typically, the advent of democracy has curbed the recruitment in favour of less politicised joiners.

Overall though, neither immediate cash rewards, nor purely ideological concerns can be said to constitute the major factors behind enlistment into the militia despite the fact that the organisation as a whole seems to have progressively abandoned its purely political and ideological activism to favour income generating activities. To overcome its financial constraint, the OPC doesn't resort to external sponsors or to looting: it fulfils ordinary activities in which it has a comparative advantage, primarily security. This might be the result of a strategic move to make the organisation economically sustainable. This blurs the binary analytical framework proposed by Weinstein that doesn't give room to groups that form major – and, according to many in the case surveyed, legitimate - informal social regulation of communities with which it is enmeshed. In fact, OPC's nature seems to be a double one: political and social. In a sense, the "normality" of the militia might explain why its followers are not loose molecules nor pure ideologues but seemingly ordinary people, sharing a feeling of vulnerability and thus particularly keen on protecting their lives or belongings.

At a normative level, recognising the possibility of such a hybrid type of violent movement might have some consequences. Weinstein rightly argued that social capital based armed groups might be more cohesive than organisations based on shallow material interests and that the expected length of conflict might be affected. This certainly also holds in our case but crucially this might not only simply result from the internal incentives provided within the organisation. “Civilians” benefiting from the militia’s services on a regular basis might also be potential defenders of the ethnic organisation.

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