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How Do Ethnic Militias Perpetuate in Nigeria? A Micro-level Perspective on the Oodua People's Congress¹

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Abstract: The paper discusses the recently promoted view that organized insurgent violence should either be conducted by activists bonded together by social capital ties or self-interested quasi-mercenaries, depending on the type of financial resources available to the group. We contrast this perspective with the study of an ethnic Nigerian militia, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC). It appears that the success of this militia over time was jointly sustained by important preexisting social connections and numerous opportunities for economic gains. The perpetuation of OPC, we argue, is ensured by a 'moral economy' whose members enjoy self-insurance in an environment perceived as unsafe.

Keywords: Militias, Violent Mobilization, Extra-legal Governance, Security, Africa, Nigeria

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent seminal contributions in the literature on civil conflicts have explored the micro-foundations of collective political violence. A great deal of attention is now paid to the non-state collective actors that organize violence and the specific constraints and challenges they face: gathering funds, recruiting combatants, enforcing rank and files' commitment. The strategies implemented to solve these challenges have been shown to influence crucial outcomes such as the intensity of violence or the sustainability of violent groups over time.

The paper discusses the recently promoted view that organized insurgent violence should either be conducted by activists bonded together by social capital ties or self-interested quasi-mercenaries, depending on the type of financial resources available to the group. We contrast this perspective with the study of an ethnic Nigerian militia, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC).

Section II discusses the existing conceptual frameworks related to violent organizations and states our analytical puzzle. Section III details and interprets our empirical findings on the organizational dynamics of the OPC. Section IV presents and comments the results concerning OPC militants' profiles and subjective motives for violent engagement. Section V concludes.

2. ORGANIZING NON-STATE POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The recent literature on violent conflicts and, more specifically, irregular armed groups - defined as private groups contesting the state's monopoly of legitimate

coercion (Davis, 2003) - is increasingly studying the interdependence of micro and organizational level dynamics to understand issues like enlistment of combatants; form, scale and location of violence; and the duration of armed conflicts.

The greed/grievances dichotomy (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998), has controversially reified two perspectives on the rebellion-making mechanism. Put simply, rebellion should either be considered as the aggregation of self-interested calculations of individuals or the consequence of mounting injustice feelings among sections of the population tied together by preexisting identity bonds. This framework has engendered sophisticated macro-level research on the economic, social and political conditions likely to precipitate civil wars (see, among others, Humphreys, 2005; Stewart, 2008). However statistical accounts, though useful for generalization purposes and cross-country comparisons, have overlooked the very process through which violence is organized and implemented.

Following recent analytical advances (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Kalyvas, 2006), violence is now recognized as a qualitatively separate issue from conflict, rather than a mere degree of it. If we except spontaneous riots, the great bulk of violence witnessed during civil wars is - at least to some extent - planned, and perpetrated by members of *organized* groups. Hence, to address such questions as why, where and how physical violence is perpetrated, a meso-level look at violent organizations is a necessary complement to the macro-level perspectives evoked above. One should address the ways these organizations are designed, structured and how they operate practically.

Here, crucially, questions of finance sustaining armed organizations arise. Various more or less exclusive options exist: finance may be gathered through illegal diversion of natural resources, external sponsorship, coercive taxation of civilians, voluntary contributions, cross-border trafficking and smuggling, or, more spectacularly, criminal kidnapping or robbery. The second challenge a rebel entrepreneur has to overcome is to recruit manpower and make sure it sticks together over time.

Weinstein's recent account on the 'industrial organization of violence' articulates neatly rebels' fundraising activities and their recruiting strategies in a typology made of two polar organizational strategies, alternatively labeled 'activist' or 'opportunistic' (Weinstein, 2006). Weinstein introduces an explicit and continuous trade-off between the two organizational strategies that decisively affect recruitment policies. To him, the respective shares of politicized activists and opportunists within a rebellion directly stem from the financial constraints faced by rebel leaders. Recruiting strategies are *ex ante* choices. Financially well-endowed rebellions tend to attract recruits driven by immediate profit prospects while poor rebellions have to resort to recruits less attracted by quick material benefits. The existence of locally lootable natural resources or external sponsorship facilitate the emergence of the 'opportunist' type of rebellion, while the lack of instant material rewards for militants needs to be substituted by non economic bonds broadly categorized by Weinstein as 'social capital' (shared norms or ideologies, friendship, family and ethnic ties). Disenfranchised youths, Weinstein argues, are likely to join richly-endowed violent movements while educated people, discounting the future to a lesser extent, may be recruited in ideologically strong organizations. Weinstein's model has important

implications for the sustainability of violent groups over time. Monetary-based enlistment is assumed to entail weaker commitment than social capital-based militancy. As a consequence, rebellions built upon strong non-economic bonds are likely to last longer than purely predatory movements.

Weinstein's model has two major characteristics that we want to discuss. First, his binary typology of insurgent groups rests on a demand-driven approach of rebellion-making, structurally determined by access to finance. Rebel leaders are left with two options, namely going for the 'opportunistic' or 'activist' type of violent labor force. Which choice will prevail is dictated in advance by economic constraints. Recruits subsequently self-select into the collective accordingly, without modifying the inner logic of the group. Does this sequential and binary rationale apply to Nigerian ethnic militias is our first interrogation. Second, when analyzing the dynamic of armed groups, Weinstein grants "initial conditions" a determining role, making further changes over time path-dependent. Is path dependency the correct way to envisage armed groups' dynamic is our second question. Both questions are treated by looking at the Oodua People's Congress, an ethnic militia active in Nigeria whose history has been carefully studied and of which 167 of its militants have been interviewed at length through structured questionnaires. Specifically, we address Weinstein's two major statements by firstly looking at whether the profile and subjective motives for enlistment of rank and files of the militia are unambiguously and sufficiently homogenous to reflect one single, *ex ante*, economically determined recruitment strategy pertaining to Weinstein's binary alternative; and by, secondly, evaluating the extent to which the dynamic of the group originates in "initial conditions" and is path dependent.

3. A NIGERIAN ETHNIC MILITIA: THE OODUA PEOPLE'S CONGRESS

(a) Violence in Nigerian Politics

Nigeria's tormented recent political history combines many of the stereotypes attached to conflict-prone countries. Oil represents an average of 70% of Nigeria's past years' federal revenues (Bach, 2004; Mustapha, 2002). Standards of living remain poor: around 70% of Nigerians live on less than one dollar a day and 44% 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 ethnic and religious constituents. Three 'majority' groups account for 50% of the population: the Hausa-Fulani (North), the Yoruba (Southwest) and the Igbo (East). 'Minority' groups are particularly present in the Middle Belt or in the coastal Niger Delta region. The population in the North is mainly Muslim while the South is mainly Christian. These ethno-religious divides coincide with strong economic and social imbalances. Military regimes have ruled the country most of the time since independence from Britain in 1960. Democracy was introduced in 1999 but hasn't erased elites' corrupt behaviors inherited from three decades of dictatorial rule. Repressive governing methods and opaque management of the oil rent have prevented the development of harmonious political and redistributive institutions, despite Nigeria's federal polity. Nigeria's political instability in the past decades partly stems from its peculiar political economy. Oil revenues are accumulated at the federal level to be re-allocated to other tiers of the Federation in accordance with a complex and disputed formula. The outcome is that each tier of the Federation is bonded to the Centre *via* clientelistic

relations. States and Local Governments' resources are almost exclusively derived from transfers from the 'Federation Account' (Ahmad & Singh, 2003). Regional and local representatives then tend to focus their political efforts exclusively on securing an access to the federal rent, disregarding the social and economic aspirations of their local constituencies. This 'representation without taxation' effect (Guyer, 1994) fuels the criminalization of politics. As shown by the elections in April 2007, electoral appointments are violently contested via sponsored armed groups used to help perpetuating local 'godfathers'' political rule. In this struggle, ethnic rhetoric is frequently resorted to as an instrument to mobilize the voters³. Symptomatically, the three major ethnic groups in the country and many 'minority groups' are represented by one or more militias allegedly defending their 'rights'. The Oodua People's Congress (OPC) is one of the most prominent of these groups.

(b) Are Nigerian ethnic militias rebel groups?

Ethnic militias in the Nigerian context are particular insurgent groups. Most of them defend a "cause" aligned with ethnic interests; they have access to coercive means and are embroiled in numerous deadly face-offs with the police or other communities. These features explain why we chose Weinstein's analysis of the 'politics of insurgent violence' as our principal theoretical inspiration. However, Nigerian ethnic militias are not rebellions in the sense of groups ultimately aiming to overthrow incumbents, opting for clandestineness and waging guerilla type of warfare. This is because, one may argue following Reno (Reno, 2002), local political and economic baronies

³ Detailed accounts on political elites' activation of youths gangs and militias in the Niger Delta are provided by Human Rights Watch (2007) and Ukiwo (2007).

ultimately manage to engulf them in their patronage network and instrumentalise them. Their reformist social messages based on self-determination claims along ethnic lines as well as their massive grassroots support fail to induce radical political change as, most of the time, ruling elites manage to divert their agenda for their own electoral benefits. In Nigeria, OPC and the likes don't reject the political game in the way early Latin American revolutionary guerillas negated party politics and privileged immediate military action (Arenas, 1972). Nigerian militias tend to become constitutive elements of an intrinsically violent electoral system resorting to fraud and physical intimidation of opponents and voters (Human Rights Watch, 2003a, Human Rights Watch, 2007). Revealingly, several of our OPC informants mentioned the actions they personally took, against payment, to coercively induce voters to opt for their local political patron during the 2003 general elections. It happens though that some groups escape the close monitoring by elites and conduct full-scale insurgencies: the multiple groups operating in the Niger Delta illustrate vividly this uncontrolled process, many of them having initially benefited from local high profile figures' support during the 2003 elections before emancipating themselves from original clientelistic allegiances. Ethnic militias are then collective objects very idiosyncratic to Nigerian political economy, hybrid creatures made of culturally-based reformist insurgencies, armed wings of political parties, but also, as developed later, extra-legal governance agencies (Guichaoua, 2009). Still, they face the same kind of organizational puzzle that rebellions in the Weinstein's sense generally face: raising funds, recruiting manpower, consolidating internal cohesion... to serve objectives mostly achieved by using coercive powers. But importantly, Reno's hypothesis on the engulfment of ethnic militias in patronage politics equips us with a possible alternative to Weinstein's path dependent model of organizational change. How

resilient is the armed movement to the external pressure of party politics then becomes the key factor behind its transformation.

(c) OPC's organizational dynamic

Here we analyze OPC's design, organizational structure and leadership in a dynamic perspective. We argue that OPC was founded on solid pre-existing social networks, with the explicit political goal of achieving self-determination for the Yoruba. However the concrete means to achieve this objective have been ambiguous as political activism was progressively superseded by money-making activities such as vigilantism and collusion with political parties. How this shift was accompanied by changes in recruits' profiles is a crucial step towards our assessment of Weinstein's perspective.

The following empirical account is based on in-depth literature reviews, systematic analysis of Nigerian press clippings referring to the OPC and interviews with national and local leaders as well as members of the rank and file of the OPC between 2004 and late 2006. Also, external observers of the OPC have been interviewed, including scholars in Ibadan and Lagos and civil society representatives concerned with security issues.

The Oodua People's Congress, named after Oduduwa, the mythological ancestor of the Yoruba, is one of the largest ethnic militias in contemporary Nigeria. It is very influential in the states demographically dominated by the Yoruba, i.e. Lagos, Edo, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ondo, Kwara and Kogi states. OPC's objectives - duly

written in its constitution - have a classic nationalist flavor, glorifying the past and the necessity to preserve the Yoruba cultural and social legacy. Aims of the OPC go as follows: ‘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, 2003b: 4). A central political claim of the OPC is the organization of a ‘Sovereign National Conference’ in order to redraw radically the rules of the Federation towards greater autonomy for the regions.

The OPC claims the support of several millions members spread worldwide⁴. Whether these members are card-carrying members regularly attending meetings or mere sympathizers occasionally contributing to the activities of the group is difficult to verify, as is the proportion of "esos" (the best trained "soldiers") among the militants. OPC’s geographical coverage is wide and includes both rural and urban settings of the claimed ‘Yorubaland’. Its hierarchical structure is composed of four levels. National headquarters are based in Lagos where the two factional leaders, Frederick Fasehun and Gani Adams, reside. The organization has delegates at the state and local

⁴ In 2003, OPC’s main faction claims to have enlisted 4.8 millions members, a probably exaggerated figure. We propose the following tentative calculation to estimate the number of supporters in the sole Oyo State where most of our research was carried out: the alleged number of OPC’s smallest local units (the ‘zone’) in Oyo State is 500. If we consider 30 as the average number of affiliates per zone, then Oyo State OPC’s manpower amounts to 15 000 individuals.

government levels. 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 are created as outgrowths of existing zones of a sufficient size (i.e. over 50 militants). Zones are OPC’s most important decision-making level. Zonal coordinators have important, if not total, liberty to decide what action is to be carried out. Money is also raised at the zonal level, through fixed contributions by militants or payments of fees by the population for safeguarding areas or providing other services such as adjudication of conflicts (e.g. between landlords and tenants). Zonal representatives have regular encounters with local government and state-level coordinators to whom fees collected at the grassroots level are partially remitted. State representatives meet the national coordinator in Lagos every week.

The OPC was created under very specific circumstances characterized by frustrated promises of democratic transition and fierce repression of political opposition, under the highly corrupt and repressive military rule of General Sani Abacha. Its founder Frederick Fasehun, a prosperous highly-educated medical doctor, was known to be a union and human rights activist before becoming an ethnic leader. To him, embracing the ethnic cause was the unavoidable consequence of the course of political events (Fasehun, 2002). It stemmed from his utter personal conviction that the ruling Northern elite would never hand over power to civilians after it annulled the ‘June, 12’ elections in 1993 supposedly putting an end to the military era. Moshood Abiola, a rich Yoruba businessman, was denied electoral victory by the regime, thus creating a profound trauma among Nigerians and, particularly the Yoruba. In the aftermath of the annulment, an Interim National Government was installed by General Ibrahim

Babangida. It was soon overthrown by another General, Sani Abacha, who imposed a fierce dictatorship, accompanied by numerous political assassinations and massive diversion of public funds. This political development pushed many human rights activists and democrats into clandestine activities. Among the democrats were many Yorubas from the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Abacha's major political target. Fasehun was one of NADECO's main figures. The OPC was created in August 1994 as a reaction to government's brutality. It was godfathered by prominent Yoruba political and cultural figures and helped logistically by existing civil society structures like road workers' unions and traditional secret societies called *Oro* ((Nolte, 2004)). *Oro* societies used to be 'male-only civic associations' closely linked to Yorubaland's major nationalist party in the 1950s and 1960s, the Action Group, founded by Obafemi Awolowo, the charismatic Premier of the Western region prior to independence. *Oro* societies were also in charge of crime fighting activities. Crucially, OPC's was not an entire novelty in Yoruba social landscape. Its success wouldn't have been possible without the activation of already existing social networks and structures, deeply rooted in the society. Right at its start, OPC enjoyed a significant social capital endowment that helped channeling the first waves of recruits, making the movement resemble Weinstein's "activist" type of armed group.

A large bulk of our informants considers that the year 1999 was a turning point in the movement's history, a view confirmed by Akinyele (Akinyele, 2001) and international NGO Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2003b). A shift in OPC's strategy toward violence seemingly occurred. It coincided with the end of the military regime and the appointment of a Yoruba President, Olusegun Obasanjo which automatically weakened the legitimacy of OPC's core argument of Yoruba

marginalization in the Federation. Secondly, an alleged upsurge of criminal violence - or, more probably, a growing perception of such a phenomenon - progressively transformed the OPC into a vigilante movement. Finally, OPC's trajectory was greatly affected by the rise of a young and charismatic challenger to Fasehun: Gani Adams. In the beginning of 1999, for reasons still hotly debated, the OPC broke up into two factions, respectively led by Fasehun and Adams. Adams became the radical flag bearer of a generation which had been denied the chance to pursue education, a role that Fasehun's educated profile prevented him from holding (Maier, 2002). Crucially, while Fasehun seemingly considered that OPC inflammable youths 'able to flex their muscles' should remain under the control of educated leaders (Fasehun, 2005), Adams' perspective on what a good OPC militant is approaches the disenfranchised youth type (Guichaoua, 2009).

Although Adams' OPC theoretically shares the same political goals as Fasehun's (Adams, 2003), under his rule, OPC's ethnic rhetoric explicitly appeals to disenfranchised youths, notably through the crafting of a sanctimonious narrative of Adams' personal biography: from his apprenticeship as a modest carpenter to the top of OPC (Adebanwi, 2005). The organization was strategically redirected towards a less politicized clientele, a shift that seems to have been enacted in recruitment policies. Violent clashes involving the OPC also fuelled that trend. During the first years of Obasanjo's regime, the OPC was implicated in multiple gruesome clashes against other ethnic groups, the police or alleged criminal gangs (Human Rights Watch, 2003b; Okechukwu, 2000; Akinyele, 2001). One of our informants insisted that these various confrontations, said to have claimed hundreds of lives, forced the organization to recruit 'all sorts of thugs'.

At the same time, vigilantism progressively became one of OPC's main sources of finance. Criminality is perceived as a major concern in Nigeria, particularly in urban settings⁵. The questionable efficiency of the police in fighting crime, their pervasive corruption and heavy-handed and arbitrary behavior (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Albert, Awe, Hérault, & Omitoogun, 1995) have pushed communities to organize their security themselves, a trend exemplified by the burgeoning of "gated communities" in all major Nigerian cities (Fabiya, 2004).

OPC's equipment comprises standard cheap weapons such as locally produced, smuggled or stolen firearms. But, more importantly, being rooted in Yoruba ancestral tradition, OPC members are widely acknowledged to master magical techniques of defense, attack or divination - warranted by oath-taking ceremonies of new recruits -, a characteristic which grants them a substantial comparative advantage in security and crime fighting activities. Additionally, OPC's services are more affordable than those of formal private security outfits. OPC militants have thus been appointed by zonal coordinators to perform security activities at fixed rates (Akinyele, 2007).

Although OPC militants' interactions with their civilian neighbors generally happen through voluntary commercial transactions, instances of business protection rackets are suspected, in particular where the movement monopolizes security provision to entire market places. Importantly, beside the vigilantism and crime-fighting

⁵ A recent victimisation survey 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 & Chukwuma, 2005).

businesses, OPC also performs as a civil dispute mediator. It arbitrates landlord/tenants issues (Okechukwu, 2000) or acts as a debt collector. Today's organization's activities mostly pertain to the multifaceted realm of extra-legal governance which encompasses a wide array of duties expectedly undertaken by the state (Dixit, 2003). It thus constitutes an ambiguous political and social actor, at the same time deeply rooted in Yoruba 'civil society' and political networks and inclined to perform a variety of money-making activities.

To situate the OPC in Weinstein's typology proves uneasy because the movement's original combat for self-determination has apparently been blurred by the diversification of its social and political role. Today, activism and opportunistic motives, as the history of the organization suggests, coexist within the same movement and, one may even argue, seem to be self-reinforcing. However, a more careful sequencing of OPC's trajectory over time suggests that these two features have had different temporal momentums, an hypothesis we explore later. We will now verify whether this internal ambiguity is mirrored by grassroots militants' subjective motives and profiles.

4. MILITIA GRASSROOTS MILITANTS' PROFILES AND SUBJECTIVE MOTIVES FOR ENLISTMENT

(a) Methodology

The empirical evidence that sustains this section's findings is based on the analysis of a survey conducted among 167 OPC active rank and files in Lagos and Ibadan, the

two largest cities of the ‘Yorubaland’. Due to absence of access to full updated registers of members or OPC local sub-units, the selection of respondents was not random. Hence, our sample is not statistically representative. It relied on several personal entry points in the OPC developed in the course of research. These entry points were disconnected from each other, thus minimizing the risk of bias in the types of respondents encountered. We managed to obtain the clearance to carry out individual interviews in nine zones (eight in Ibadan, one in Lagos), supervised by zonal coordinators who were also interviewed at length. These nine zones represent a tiny fraction of the number of zones in each city which amount to several dozens. Accessing zones claiming Fasehun’s patronage proved impossible. This mainly reflects the shrinkage of Fasehun’s hold on the rank and file level since Adams’s rise in the organization⁶. The followers of an OPC splinter group, the Federation of Yoruba Culture and Consciousness (FYCC) were also interviewed. They represent two of the nine zones surveyed.

Although the choice of zones covered by the survey was not random, the number of respondents in each zone was exhaustive, with all the militants attached to one zone interviewed. However, since interviews were conducted at the weekly meeting of the group, those who repeatedly missed the gathering are absent from our sample. Presence at meeting is a zonal coordinator’s major concern. Absentees are fined by the zonal coordinator⁷. One might therefore expect that the bias stemming from only interviewing those who attend meeting is marginal. Furthermore, by including

⁶ However, as a founding father of OPC Fasehun remains a respected OPC figure.

⁷ Each meeting actually starts by reminding past absentees to pay their dues, which generally triggers vivid negotiations.

everyone, our strategy minimized the risk of only selecting ‘gatekeepers’ of the group, used to communicate with outsiders.

The originality of the survey lies largely in the fact that interviewees are current active members of a violent group. Most existing surveys are based on interviews with ex-combatants. By definition, surveys focusing on ex-combatants don’t sample those who died in combat. We don’t face this kind of bias. But conversely, as violence is of a mild degree in the setting we observed – which was the condition *sine qua non* of feasibility of the survey – we have no certainty that the selected respondents would participate in high intensity violence such as, say, large-scale massacres. A greater intensity of violence might deter some of the militia members from continuing militancy and provoke the enlistment of other types of individuals, less risk adverse. As a result, one should bear in mind that this section is more about who joins than who actually fights.

The questionnaire was structured to record respondents’ socio-economic profiles, life histories, the process through which they were recruited, their motives, and their duties and gains derived from militia membership. Interviews were carried out by experienced Yoruba speaking research assistants, in conditions ensuring the highest confidentiality feasible. In this research, attention was solely paid to OPC members. No control group was included so that profiles of militants cannot be compared with similar non-militants. This may constitute a major limitation of our work, would our research question have primarily revolved around participation in armed struggle (in the direction followed, for example, by Humphreys and Weinstein (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008)). This is not our main goal here as our primary focus is on

Weinstein's hypothesis on internal consistency between organizational and micro-level characteristics of armed groups. A look at the inner functioning of the movement may suffice to address this issue. However, when possible, we try to contrast our findings with existing statistical evidence for the comparable population in the region, as a way to contextualize our empirical findings.

(b) Ordinary people? OPC militants' activities and sociological characteristics

Following the above statements on the organizational evolution of OPC under Adams' impetus, one would expect the movement to be more attractive to the 'opportunistic' type of recruits, namely disenfranchised youths willing to make quick material profits. Is this assumption empirically valid?

The breakdown of activities undertaken by our respondents on behalf of OPC shows that security provision and cultural gatherings are OPC militants' two main occupations (see table 1). Political matters, despite being discussed at length with other militants, don't spark off regular concrete actions. Furthermore, the average time devoted by militants to the group remains low: seven hours per week. Militancy in the OPC doesn't entail total devotion to the cause, nor does it encompass all aspects of militants' life.

Table 1. Activities of OPC militants

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

The OPC members surveyed are 31 years old on average. They are overwhelmingly male (90%) but our qualitative evidence suggest that women are also welcome to fulfill specific duties: they are granted a specific role in the internal division of labor: they are prohibited from performing night operations like vigilantism but serve as privileged informants in the struggle against crime. (Nolte, 2008) also notes that they support and motivate combatants during fights and make sure no one behaves cowardly by ridiculing those not showing enough courage in action.

Eight interviewees out of ten are Muslims. This figure is surprisingly high as the Southwest of Nigeria is said to be predominantly Christian. It might be related to Yoruba Muslims' greater tolerance towards magical practices rigidly rejected by Christians. Incidentally, it shows that their anti-North discourse doesn't follow

confessional lines since the majority of Northerners share the same religion (although they belong to different brotherhoods).

Levels of education, occupations (table 2) and social connectedness (table 3) are the most telling indicators in assessing the disenfranchised youth hypothesis. Results are unequivocal: OPC members' average educational achievement is close to that measured among the general South-western Yoruba male population surveyed in (National Population Commission, 2004). In addition, almost none of them are jobless. They earn 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 vulnerability inherent to informal sector activities where more than 80% of them operate.

Table 2. Indicators of human capital and economic integration of OPC militants (in brackets: results of the Demographic and Health Survey for the year 2003 among Yoruba males above 18 and leaving in the southwest region)

Level of education (%)	
<i>no school</i>	2 (6)
<i>some primary</i>	10 (4)
<i>primary completed</i>	25 (20)
<i>some secondary</i>	26 (30)
<i>secondary completed</i>	28 (23)
<i>above secondary</i>	8 (17)
<i>Other</i>	1 (0)
Occupation (per cent)	
<i>Jobless</i>	1
<i>Student</i>	9
<i>unpaid employee</i>	3
<i>unprotected paid employee</i>	10
<i>self employed – trader</i>	61
<i>self employed – artisan</i>	14
<i>civil servant</i>	1
<i>Other</i>	1
Average weekly income (naira)	3470

In terms of social integration, OPC members do not look like faithless and lawless individuals. A vast majority of them is married, has children and lives in rented houses⁸. Militants don't hide their affiliation to OPC: it is public knowledge in the neighborhood they live in for almost 70% of the respondents.

⁸ One could contest this statement by suggesting that members may currently run parallel unobservable 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 or belong to the 'loose molecule' type. 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.

Table 3. Indicators of social integration of militants (%)

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

Both in economic and social terms, OPC members are not of the “disenfranchised youth” type. They have rather ordinary people’s observable 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. As a result, the militia rank and files we have interviewed shouldn’t be theoretically particularly motivated to join on purely economic incentives. The reasons they give for doing so and the processes through which they have been recruited are reported below.

(c) Subjective motives of ethnic militancy: the desire for protection

Table 4 synthesizes the answers provided on motives and recruitment channels. Immediate material benefits are not primary motives for enlistment which confirms the above finding on socio-economic profiles of militants. On the contrary, perceived indirect benefits such as protection and social status promotion constitute major incentives for enlistment.

Table 4. Enlistment motives and recruitment processes

When joining the militia, did you expect that your new situation could... (%)	
<i>facilitate your access to cash</i>	11
<i>increase your chances to get a new/better job</i>	17
<i>facilitate your contacts with opp. sex</i>	22
<i>improve the way you are considered in the neighborhood</i>	45
<i>grant you new powers to defend yourself and your relatives</i>	90
<i>expand your political awareness</i>	31
Did a particular event decide you to join? (%)	
<i>a personal event</i>	19
<i>a political event</i>	15
Difference between the militia and other political or cultural organizations (%)	
<i>well-organized</i>	19
<i>neat behavior</i>	65
<i>political project</i>	29
<i>better for business</i>	4
<i>more protective</i>	41
Channels of recruitment (%)	
<i>friends, neighbors</i>	60
<i>patronage</i>	22
<i>spontaneous application</i>	18

Immediate economic reasons (access to cash, better job) are expressed in less than one case out of five. Indeed, when we explored this issue further with 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 charms necessary to carry out activities with the group entails substantial expenses. The most often quoted reason to join refers to the desire for protection. Charms obtained through OPC membership are reputed to favor 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 unknown future’ as an impetus behind affiliation. The anxiety motivating the enlistment is also present in the respondents’

justifications for choosing OPC rather than any other group: a large majority of them acclaim OPC's 'neat behavior', i.e. the fact that, unlike political parties or local self-help groups, the organization 'doesn't cheat' its members. OPC is viewed as a group that cares for its needy followers. It is expected to have a direct and immediate positive impact on its members' well-being. Among the many positive characteristics of OPC quoted by respondents are: 'solidarity'⁹, 'oneness', 'togetherness' etc. All these expressions refer to protection and sense of belonging and, to some extent, spiritual elevation. Importantly, whether through increased personal prestige or enlargement of bonding social connections, OPC is also perceived as a facilitator of status promotion by many: almost 45% of the respondents expect that joining OPC will improve the personal respect they enjoy in their neighborhood. Sex is also said to be made easier by membership by a non-negligible proportion of respondents (22%).

Crucially, these views seem to be influenced and encouraged by militants' entourage which often facilitates the enlistment. Less than one out of five respondents spontaneously applied to OPC. Others were recommended by friends and patrons who were generally already members. "Social capital", as Weinstein would put it, is blatantly at play here. But one should note that recruitment through friends and recruitment through patrons may have different consequences for the type of socialization the group produces locally: solidarity among equals differs from paternalistic distribution through patronage. In the zone surveyed in Lagos, most of the militants were recruited by the coordinator among his immediate social network. This was a way for the coordinator to distribute personal favors and hence reinforce

⁹ 'Solidarity for ever' is the group motto, chanted repetitively during meetings.

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 table 4, only 31% of the respondents thought that becoming an OPC member could expand their political awareness. Stressing the salience of non ideology-related motives doesn't necessarily cast doubt on respondents' sincerity towards the OPC's political 'cause'. All respondents have assimilated the Yoruba nationalist rhetoric of their leaders. When prompted to tell the interviewer what OPC is, they, without hesitation, almost systematically put forward its collective objective consisting in 'promoting and protecting Yoruba interests in Nigeria'. However as shown by the statistical hierarchy of the answers provided in table 5, ideological adherence to the organization doesn't constitute an obstacle to the presence of other, much more diverse, considerations when joining. It might simply constitute a fundamental object of consensus among the militants, beyond which many other characteristics make the membership of the organization desirable.

(d) Actual gains: protected economic exchanges, assistance and subjective well-being

Does OPC match the expectations of its militants? A look at the immediate actual gains obtained through militia membership (table 5) confirms the above results. It shows that protection and assistance are effectively provided by the OPC. This protection is symbolic or spiritual (charms, also called *jujus*) and material. Cash is

offered to militants in case of injury, illness or other unfortunate personal event. Strikingly, OPC supersedes family as a source of assistance: the group can be said to form a space of socialization which reliably provides help. In addition, a great majority of the militia rank and file benefit from the more regular, although indirect, solidarity permitted by continuous business relations. The OPC is therefore not only an informal insurance mechanism protecting against idiosyncratic 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 this informal solidarity network tying up OPC militants predated any membership since, as already observed, recruitment is frequently channeled through existing social bonds. The least we can say, however, is that OPC membership represents an opportunity to strengthen and, probably enhance (e.g. through vigilantism) the benefits of this ‘moral economy’¹⁰. As shown in the table, these solidarity ties do not necessarily result in a tangible improvement of respondent’s economic situation but in a dramatic improvement of their feelings of protection and psychological comfort. ‘Peace of mind’, ‘rest of mind’, ‘confidence’ are very often quoted as major changes induced by membership.

¹⁰ 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.

Table 5. Material and non-material rewards of militia membership

Immediate rewards before or after operations (%)	
<i>Cash</i>	6
<i>Food</i>	5
<i>non medical drugs / jujus</i>	76
First source of assistance in case of problems (%)	
<i>Nobody</i>	3
<i>spouse / partner</i>	10
<i>Parents</i>	23
<i>brothers / sisters</i>	4
<i>other relatives</i>	2
<i>local militia leaders</i>	8
<i>other militia members</i>	31
<i>non-militia friends</i>	11
Militia as part of the first 4 sources of assistance (%)	63
Does the militia help in case of... (percentage of yes)	
<i>injury in operation</i>	98
<i>Illness</i>	99
<i>other urgent need</i>	99
Proportion of members having business contacts with other members	63
What has the movement brought to your life (open-ended question, %)	
<i>psychological comfort / behavioral improvement</i>	41
<i>no more problem</i>	10
<i>Protection</i>	40
<i>better economic situation</i>	16
<i>nothing yet</i>	7

The OPC shares many features with the sectarian groups and club goods providers at once described by Iannaccone and Berman (Iannaccone, 1994; Iannaccone & Berman, 2006): entry requires sacrifices (in our case: oath taking, devotion of time, display of courage, purchase of *jujus* etc.) which helps to screen applicants and reinforces the credibility of their commitment toward the group. Such groups, Iannaccone and Berman continue, are likely to emerge in contexts where the provision of social

services by the government is low, which is blatantly the case in Nigeria. The OPC acts as a club-goods provider in a socio-economic environment largely abandoned by the state. This feature hardly fits with the binary perspective proposed by Weinstein, as it encompasses simultaneously psychological and emotional investment as well as a complex web of economic transactions. This is the present situation of OPC, though. Yet, in line with Weinstein's hypothesis on consistency between organizational and micro-level characteristics of armed groups and following our earlier questioning on a possible structural change of the organization happening around the year 1999, we want to check whether heterogeneity of profiles or motives prevails among militants.

(e) Heterogeneity among militants?

We hypothesize that the coexistence of various kinds of motives to join might reflect some degree of heterogeneity of preferences within our sample, possibly encompassing Weinstein's binary alternative. Since we observed an organizational shift from the original determined activism in reaction to government's brutality towards lucrative extra-legal governance activities, we could expect the group to be composed of a mixture of 'old days' politicized activists and recent short-termist opportunists - all these notions being obviously relative. A way to verify this hypothesis is to split the sample into two subgroups, respectively composed of early joiners and late joiners. Using the year 1999 as a reference point to differentiate between the two subgroups makes sense: the inception of the Fourth Republic constitutes a major turning point in 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. Of course our comparison rests on the - pretty strong - assumption that early joiners haven't all defected and/or haven't entirely abandoned their initial ideals. Yet, the mere fact that they remain in OPC signals some minimal degree of acceptance of the organization's suspected strategic evolution. Any remaining trace of heterogeneity would thus be, we argue, a telling indicator of time-changing attributes of OPC militancy.

We use standard mean comparison tests to see whether pre-democracy joiners differ systematically from post-democracy joiners in various respects. We choose to compare individual characteristics that, as far as possible, don't change over time, in order to make sure that observed differences do not 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. Despite these caveats, clear differences are still observable between the two subgroups that tend to strengthen the hypothesis of a shift of recruits' profiles, from 'ideologues' toward more self-interested and less politicized members. Results are shown in table 6 below.

Table 6. Have recruits profiles varied over years (number of observations=167)?

	Pre- democracy joiners (mean, n=42)	Post-democracy joiners (mean, n=125)	Mean differences
Education - more than primary educ	0.64 (0.07)	0.64 (0.04)	0.00
Role of political events (‘June, 12’)	0.31 (0.07)	0.01 (0.02)	0.30***
Spontaneous application	0.24 (0.07)	0.15 (0.03)	0.09
Expectations when joining			
<i>Cash</i>	0.05 (0.03)	0.14 (0.03)	-0.09**
<i>Job</i>	0.05 (0.03)	0.21 (0.04)	- 0.16***
<i>Sex</i>	0.19 (0.06)	0.23 (0.04)	-0.04
<i>Respect</i>	0.45 (0.08)	0.46 (0.04)	-0.01
<i>Powers</i>	0.83 (0.06)	0.92 (0.02)	-0.09
<i>Political awareness</i>	0.33 (0.07)	0.30 (0.04)	0.03
Promises made when joining			
<i>Political promises</i>	0.21 (0.06)	0.20 (0.04)	0.01
<i>Protection promises</i>	0.14 (0.05)	0.40 (0.04)	- 0.26***
<i>Material promises</i>	0.02 (0.02)	0.06 (0.02)	-0.04

Activities within OPC			
<i>Cultural</i>	0.90 (0.05)	0.87 (0.03)	0.03
<i>Political discussions</i>	0.76 (0.07)	0.74 (0.04)	0.02
<i>Spiritual</i>	0.62 (0.08)	0.58 (0.04)	0.04
<i>Political demonstrations</i>	0.29 (0.07)	0.17 (0.03)	0.08
<i>Crime-fighting</i>	0.90 (0.05)	0.77 (0.04)	0.13**
<i>Security</i>	0.71 (0.07)	0.69 (0.04)	0.02
<i>Actions against other groups</i>	0.59 (0.08)	0.46 (0.04)	0.13
What has OPC brought to your life?			
<i>Psychological benefits</i>	0.43 (0.08)	0.41 (0.04)	0.02
<i>No more problem</i>	0.10 (0.05)	0.10 (0.03)	0.00
<i>Greater protection</i>	0.52 (0.08)	0.36 (0.04)	0.16*
<i>Better economic situation</i>	0.05 (0.03)	0.20 (0.04)	- 0.15***

Standard errors in brackets

***: significant at 99% of confidence

**: significant at 95% of confidence

*: significant at 90% of confidence

Here, differences are of greater importance than absolute figures. Answers between the two sub-groups significantly differ in many important respects. First of all, political events have more often constituted an impetus for enlistment for pre-

democracy joiners than for post-democracy joiners. ‘June 12’ annulment of Abiola’s election was frequently mentioned by pre-democracy joiners, mirroring the often quoted ‘trauma’ that this annulment provoked. Enlistment in the post-democracy era appears to be motivated by more self-interested considerations: post-democracy members mention their hopes, when entering the movement, to reap material benefits (access to cash or jobs) from their militancy in significantly higher proportions than their pre-democracy counterparts. This could reflect the evolution of OPC over time: after 1999, OPC was firmly installed as an extra-legal governance social institution opening up economic opportunities that could be easily foreseen by potential recruits. The immediate post-1999 years are also those during which OPC was involved in some gruesome clashes. According to many of our informants, this coincided with the recruitment of ‘all sorts of thugs’ or ‘bad eggs’, largely as a consequence of indiscriminate police repression. Interestingly in this respect, the late joiners were more often explicitly promised some protection when joining. This maybe signals OPC’s deliberate decision to use its alleged expertise in magic practices to attract new applicants. Finally post-democracy joiners also admit 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 pre-democracy joiners. The latter stress their greater feeling of protection since enlistment. A last significant difference between the two strata of the OPC members of our sample is less straightforwardly interpretable: the participation in crime-fighting operations is more frequent among the early joiners. This might be explained by the hierarchical division of labor prevailing within the movement. The most senior members might be more skilled (physically and spiritually) to engage in this kind of activity which certainly also attracts local prestige. Whether these activities are more rewarding in monetary

terms compared to regular security provision such as vigilantism is a question that requires further investigation. What the above evidence still shows is that profiles of militants changed over time. Recruitment of militants seems to have been layered: early joiners share more of the characteristics of Weinstein's 'activists' than late joiners who admit relatively more often opportunistic intentions behind their enlistment. Yet, we insist that this statement doesn't reflect profound disagreement between the two sub-groups - notably on the undertaking of vigilantism or crime-fighting operations by the movement - as shown by their ongoing presence in the movement. Note that attempts have been made to check intra-sample heterogeneity in other dimensions (location, age, factional affiliation) without producing significant results.

Our results seemingly give credence to Weinstein's view that a rise in the moneymaking opportunities attached with militancy favors the recruitment of opportunistic followers. However, there might be some confusing factor here as the rise of economic opportunities coincides with a change of leadership from which new patterns of recruitment may also derive: unlike his predecessor Fasehun, Gani Adams explicitly appealed to the marginalized youths. The change of militants' profiles hence may reveal as much a shift of personal power balance within the organization as a strategic decision to develop lucrative activities. Both possibilities, one should add, are related to changes of the environment, specifically the violent clashes with the police that took place during the democratic transition which urged OPC leaders for rapid reactions and contributed to sideline those advocating less confrontational attitudes towards security forces. Despite uncertainty about dominant causal mechanisms at play, what the above shows is that the trajectory of OPC was shaped

by complex interdependent external and internal influences hardly attributable to the “initial conditions” in which the movement was created. The remaining overwhelming facts that recruitment follows preexisting social connections and that self-insurance concerns are pervasive among grassroots militants whose coercive powers are also used in party politics sustain Reno’s view on organizational change of Nigerian ethnic militias: they fail to radicalize and end up being caught in the mundane social webs of a moral economy dominated by patrons.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The present paper has discussed whether the particular form of organized insurgent violence that the OPC represents in Nigeria enters the binary typology proposed by Weinstein’s seminal work on rebellions. To Weinstein, economic constraints faced by rebel leaders are the major determinants of their recruitment strategies. Abundance of funds results in the recruitment of self-interested quasi-mercenaries while lack of resources necessitates alternative recruitment processes based on social or ideological ties. Weinstein’s approach’s extreme appeal resides in its parsimonious and simultaneous explanation of characteristics of armed groups and individual participants in organized insurgent violence. It appears though that the success of the OPC over time was jointly sustained by important preexisting social connections and numerous opportunities for economic gains. OPC, we argue, functions as a club goods provider or a restricted ‘moral economy’ whose members, tied to each other by a dense web of mundane transactions, enjoy self-insurance in an environment perceived as unsafe. Social capital and regular business contacts intimately mingle to ensure the continuation of the militia. The main bulk of OPC’s followers don’t display socio-

demographic characteristics making them resemble short-termist quasi-mercenaries. They are relatively not economically deprived. One should add that this statement reflects the movement's present situation: early joiners seem more politicized than late comers, which resonates with Weinstein's structural perspective. However one is unable to attribute this change to the organization's opening up to lucrative activities or to a change in its leadership. At a more general level, why OPC doesn't perfectly fit Weinstein's perspective on rebellions may be ultimately explained by the Nigerian idiosyncratic context which prevents ethnic militias from drastically radicalising, despite their high propensity to resort to violence. As convincingly put by Reno (Reno, 2002), they end up being engulfed by patronage networks serving high-profile politicians. Notable exceptions to this phenomenon are the many insurgent groups of the Niger Delta determined to systematically confront the security forces.

From a policy perspective, our findings highlight how the absence of provision of basic services by the state fuels the enlistment in ethnic militias. Self-insurance mechanisms proposed by the OPC have been showed to be the main drivers of engagement of grassroots militants, even superseding the hopes of immediate material rewards. The majority of joiners has families, runs licit - although informal - businesses and aspires to "neatness" and "oneness", all characteristics that many ordinary Nigerians share. These are not fundamentally anti-social attitudes or worldviews to which force should be opposed. Quite oppositely, provision of both economic and physical security to populations might be the best way to prevent the sustainability of groups contesting the state's monopoly over coercive means.

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