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Armed Rebellion in Collapsed States

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Abstract

Standard theories of insurgency hold that marginalization from centers of power provide insurgents with social space to develop coherent organizational and ideological challenges to authority. Insurgents in recent cases of state collapse, however, do not develop ideological or organizational alternatives. This is due to the particular nature of state collapse, especially where rulers had used informal institutional networks to control populations. As formal bureaucratic institutions collapse, remnants of patronage networks coopt would-be ideological fighters. Strongmen use armed fighters to control fragments of the old patronage economy. This empowers enterprising fighters interested in personal wealth at the expense of ideologues. This dynamic is illustrated with reference to vigilante groups in Nigeria, especially the Bakassi Boys of Anambra State, which initially develop as anti-corruption and anti-regime fighters, then become incorporated into the strategies of the politicians whom they fight. The course of internal warfare in Sierra Leone and former Yugoslavia provide further illustration of this process.

Looting, banditry, greedy, self-interested warlords and well-heeled arms traffickers dominate images of warfare in places like Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Colombia and Chechnya. Recent international attention to the problem of "conflict diamonds"—gems that warring groups mine and then trade for arms—has brought this economic dimension of warfare to a broader audience. Even in Côte d'Ivoire, where mass protests in October 2000 were initially lauded in the international press as a sequel to Serbian democrats' overthrow of Milosevic, closer examination reveals the considerable influence of elite factional struggles for power and control over patronage resources.

That combatants fight for loot and personal profit in the midst of warfare is hardly new. What is new about post-cold war internal wars and rebellions, especially in Africa, is the extent to which economic interests appear to predominate, crowding out those who organize followers around ideologically motivated reform and revolutionary appeals. I argue that this is because these wars and rebellions constitute a special category of conflict. They are the consequence of the collapse of state institutions. This change in the nature of violence presents ideological leaders with much greater difficulties in organizing collective action. The failure of opposition groups to build alternative mass-based political movements or to develop indigenous strategies for addressing the pressures and chal-

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lenges of international society owes much to this context. This type of conflict almost always occurs in places where government officialdom is riddled with corruption. It is not that these places are necessarily grossly more corrupt than places like Indonesia or South Korea. More important, corruption is a consequence of a particular manner of rule that is hostile to state institutions and the provision of public order, not simply a result of inefficiency or nepotism. This misrule generates substantial domestic criticism that one might reasonably expect to lead to successful mass movements for systemic change. Yet it lays the basis for the rise of insurgencies that do not articulate clear ideological alternatives and abjure attempts to administer conquered areas or mobilize mass support.

This article considers several cases in Africa, but focuses on Nigeria. This country ought to be among the best candidates in Africa for the emergence of groups that present reformist ideological and programmatic alternatives to contemporary politics. "In Nigeria," even under the repressive Abacha regime (1994–98) wrote Larry Diamond, "human rights organizations continued to research, publicize, expose, lobby, and organize, sometimes treading more carefully while still facing arrest and imprisonment" [Diamond 1999: 238]. Yet Nigeria's most prominent opposition figures appear among armed youth gangs that present the image of social bandits struggling to overturn a deeply corrupt political system, but at the same time associate with those whom they criticize. A journalist writes of Imo State: "The community is under siege by a gang of armed robbers who have formed a youth association. The gang allegedly led by an influential chief in the community, brazenly and openly carry out its nefarious activities" [Ikwunze 2000: 18].

These violent opposition groups signal the emergence of a social category associated with collapsing states. Though they may view themselves as marginalized from rulers, this ruling elite brings opposition groups together for its own interests. Rebellion on these terms is not collective action in the sense that one finds among social bandits and others usually associated with marginalized or excluded groups, since its aim is not to destroy the existing social structure of society [Wolf 1999; Hobsbawm 2000; Scott 1987]. Instead, these groups seek to gain as much utility from existing political society as possible, even when members join out of ideological conviction. They and their backers manipulate interstices of the system, proclaiming no long-term allies or enemies. Their primary goal is to force their way into the social system from which they are excluded, not overthrow it. Nor do societal dislocations of devastating internal war and massive refugee movements lead to the development of new organizations capable of refashioning and strengthening the organization of the state. This stands in contrast to the rise of strong reformist movements following social turmoil in Japan, China and Vietnam in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example [Johnson 1962; Popkin 1979]. Why this is so is the subject of this article.

Rulers Who Are Hostile to State Institutions

Why would rulers intentionally undermine their own state institutions, and lead their countries to the point of collapse in the first place? Most post-colonial states lacked a clear consensus on how to govern, especially in Africa, and arguably now in some parts of the former Soviet Union such as Moldova, Tajikistan, and Georgia. A common strategy included articulating a vague sense of nationalism, which during the Cold War usually found expression in domestic policies of economic self-sufficiency and the diplomacy of non-alignment. Ideally, this was accompanied with the mobilization of a cooperative population to promote growing prosperity and revenues to pay for more government administration to meet challenges of internal disorder, global markets, and international political pressures.

The reality was that rulers soon faced challenges from their own subordinates. Sub-Saharan Africa suffered its first military coup in 1963. By 2000 military rulers had replaced civilian governments in more than half of Africa's states. Since 1960, African rulers faced about a 60 percent chance that their terms would end in their violent death, exile or imprisonment. In 2001, for example, Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan—9 of Africa's 54 states—faced major armed struggles to replace incumbent regimes. Six of these conflicts included elements of national armies and individuals who once served the rulers they sought to replace [Sollenberg *et al.* 2000: 52–55]. Incumbent rulers respond by undermining military command structures and manipulating factional conflicts within militaries while creating multiple special anti-crime units, informal paramilitaries and palace guards. While providing greater short-term security for rulers (and occasionally attracting foreign support and resources), the long-term impact has been to distribute weapons and military expertise more widely in societies. Instead of creating conditions leading to a state monopoly of coercion—a key component of a Weberian "ideal" state and objective of actual states that can claim strong social control—it creates very weak and internally divided states. Most African and a few post Soviet "warlords" originate within this context of fragmented military organization, and then come to the fore once the formal bureaucratic and informal patronage-based or charismatic authority of the strongman leader collapses.

Many rulers of post-colonial states take pains to buy the loyalty, or at least compliance of key groups in society. The most efficient way of doing this in the short-term has been to use state resources and assets as patronage, distributed at the personal discretion of the ruler. While effective at building power bases, this practice further undermines state agencies that provide services to the wider population. In the alternative, rulers find that effective bureaucrats pose a potential political threat. Their success would stand in glaring contrast to the record of incumbent elites, and could become the nucleus for the mobilization of disgruntled citizens who criticize favoritism and corruption.

Commerce, Politics, and the Rise of Warlords

Accordingly, rulers who rule through patronizing the powerful few may logically chose to undermine their own state's institutions. For these rulers to spend money on services like education and health care (which reached zero in 1992 in Zaire, shortly before the government stopped publishing budgets) would be to waste it according to this perspective, since a critical public would remain suspicious of politicians' intentions even if they received some services. Liberia's government, for example, reported a budget of just $65 million for all of its official operations in 1999 [IMF 2000: 30]. At the same time, President Charles Taylor found resources to support his Special Security Unit, Security Operations Division, "Demon Force," Joint Security Forces, National Bureau of Investigation, and Anti-Terrorist Unit, along with irregular personal forces such as "Charlie's Angels."

If patronage politics coexisted with strong state agencies in deeply divided societies, subordinates might contemplate using an effective state agency as a base to remove their errant patron and to control these resources for themselves. Rulers try to avoid this scenario by leaving their states bereft of formal institutions and bureaucratic hierarchies. Since they fear using formal agencies to control associates and subordinates (or they have weakened them to the point of ineffectiveness), rulers resort to manipulation of markets to manage their clients. Loyal associates might be permitted access to economic opportunities, such as smuggling or transactions in illicit goods such as drugs. Such informal networks may grow very large, including, or at least affecting, many people who might be considered "marginal" in the context of the weakening of bureaucratic institutions. In Benin in the 1980s, for example, the US Department of Commerce reported that 90 percent of the country's trade did not appear in official statistics [Allen 1989: 231]. Much of this informal trade occurred through channels controlled by Benin's president and officials closely associated with him [Igue & Soule 1992]. In fact, the president's critics accused him of acting as the country's primary informal market trader and accomplice in bank frauds [Chabi 1994]. In such cases, the ruler acts as a racketeer, selling exemption from prosecution or using his control over the state to help his business partners and people dependent upon them. As a consequence, many of his associates develop extensive networks of their own in this commercial world—again, a development providing short-term advantages for a ruler who tries to manage scarce resources, though posing a long-term threat to him as associates encounter opportunities to freelance.

Well-armed subordinates in fact have toppled many patronage-based political systems since the end of the Cold War. This need not indicate that rulers are ignoring dangerous clients. More often it has been indicative of the loss of superpower diplomatic and military support for incumbent dictators. A more immediate cause is found in the spread of arms in societies, especially in the hands of private gangs associated with once-loyal key politicians, and paramilitary commanders, are readily used to challenge now-weakened patrons. Many "warlords" in Somalia, Congo (former Zaire), Congo-Brazzaville, and Liberia once

held high positions in the governments that they later attacked, and had developed important commercial connections as part of an old patronage network. Congo-Brazzaville's "Ninja" militia, for example, backed Bernard Kolélas, mayor of Brazzaville and a close associate of a former Prime Minister. The rival "Zoulou" militia backed Professor Pascal Lissouba, also a former Prime Minister, and victorious candidate for president in 1992 [Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999].

The prevalence of professional titles among faction leaders (such as Professor Wamba-dia-Wamba and Dr. Emile Ilunga of completing factions of the Rassemblement Congolaise pour la Démocratie, and Dr. George Boley of the Liberian Peace Council and General Mohammed Aideed of the Somali National Alliance), along with former government ministers and other notables points to the elite origins and close ties to politics of the principals involved in many of Africa's internal wars. Their connections provide valuable political raw materials in battles to topple weakened patrons and to fight off other claimants to state power. Liberia's warlord-turned-president, Charles Taylor, for example, once ran a state procurement agency for President Samuel K. Doe (1980–90). Mohammed Aideed was a diplomat for Somali president Siad Barrie (1969–91), while also building his business enterprises and overseas connections. The son and business manager of former Zaire's president Mobutu (1965–97) has reemerged as a backer of an insurgency there that battles a former smuggler who fought his own way to State House. Insurgents in Chechnya—whose war leaders have professional resumes that include head of a state construction combine and command positions in the Soviet Army—utilize clandestine smuggling and racketeer networks to bolster their incomes and to buy sophisticated weapons.

These commercial connections, usually developed through association with corrupt, patronage-based regimes, become valuable resources for leaders of insurgencies to fight their own ways into power. The role of these connections in the context of states where rulers have destroyed state agencies and have politicized clandestine commercial channels also has had a decisive impact on the nature of insurgencies in collapsed states, especially in marginalizing other groups and individuals who would prefer to pursue more conventional, more overtly ideological insurgency strategies, but who lack the commercial efficiency and capacity to accumulate resources that characterize their rivals.

The Demotion of Ideology and "Liberated Zones"

It would seem sensible in this context for insurgents, even those who associate with corrupt elites, to attract followers through appeals to reform the states they seek to control. In fact, during the Cold War, insurgents typically presented themselves as reformist alternative governments-in-waiting. Groups such as the African National Congress, Southwest African People's Liberation Organization, the Zimbabwean African People's Union and others projected an ideological image that appealed to potential followers, and sought to

build government-like administrations in liberated zones [Clapham 1996: 222–226].

In contrast, contemporary groups such as Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), Uganda's Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) and many others appear to abjure efforts to advertise a particular ideological alternative to local people. They show very little or no evidence of constructing civil or even military administrations in areas they control. Refugee flows are massive—about a third of Liberia's population in the mid 1990s, while half of residents in rebel controlled areas fled—and are usually to government-held areas or neighboring countries in these zones of conflict, even when insurgents control significant territory that could potentially serve as a safe haven to put political ideas into practice [on Liberia, US Department of State 1997; on Sierra Leone, United Nations 2000: para. 47]. Since faction leaders are often the same people who used political violence to jockey for position when there was a single elite hierarchy, they can still compete with rivals on the same basis, though now in a more fragmented political world. They often attract armed young men who seek economic opportunity through association with insurgents. This is not to argue that all African insurgents pursue personal economic agendas to the exclusion of political grievances or visions of a better future. Instead, the structure of violent organizations and their relationships with existing political networks marginalize those who press more explicitly political agendas and reward those willing to use violence to gain access to commerce and loot for themselves and their strongman backers.

At first glance, youth groups and ethnic militias in Nigeria appear to belie this tendency to focus on economic gains and access to patronage. In the country's southwest, the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) claims to agitate for the autonomy of ethnic Yoruba areas of Nigeria and to campaign for what they would term more accountable, democratic governance. At the very least, a moderate faction envisions a radically decentralized Nigerian federal system, while a more radical faction talks of a separate ethnic Yoruba-based Oodua Republic. They boast of a plethora of associated well-organized groups, such as the Oodua Self-Determination Groups (COSLEG), the Oodua Liberation Movement (OLM), the Yoruba Revolutionary Movement (YOREM) and the Oodua Youth Movement (OYM) [Ahiuma-Young and Akpobasa 2000: 4]. The OPC has taken on tasks that suggest that it is capable of generating a reformist alternative to the existing Nigerian state and to establish its own administrative organizations in communities. Most prominent has been the organization of members to take on vigilante tasks, joined by paramilitary groups such as Neighbourhood Watch to fight a terrible wave of violent crime that Nigerian government officials appear unable to contain. Members perform more mundane tasks such as directing traffic, administering markets, and punishing officials who take bribes, apparently as part of an effort to build support and demonstrate to citizens the gross incapacity of the Nigerian state to serve public interests [Ajulo 2000: 12; Olabisi 2000: 5; Mumuni 2000: 40–41]. The initial popularity of these groups suggests that many Nigerians saw them as viable alternatives to corrupt and inept government officials.

Incumbent politicians and administrators take seriously the threat that the vision of Nigerian politics that OPC and groups like them pose to the country's political hierarchy. "Our primary objective," stated Kayode Ogundamisi, OPC's National Secretary, "was to canvass a sovereign national conference that will lead us to an autonomous Yoruba nation" [Tunji 2000: 15]. Meanwhile, OPC's anti-crime forces attacked and killed policemen alleged to shield and collude with armed robbers. Then on 16 July 2000 police in Lagos opened fire on OPC members, killing scores of protestors. OPC clashes with ethnic Hausas in Lagos in October 2000 led to the deaths of over 100 people. An earlier Lagos State Senate investigation of OPC-police clashes in late 1999 and early 2000 declared that 9 police and 7 OPC members were killed, along with 163 innocent civilians, and that 12 police stations were burned [Human Rights Watch 2001: 143].

Other armed groups attack government officials who they condemn as corrupt and predatory, while providing public services. The Bakassi Boys in eastern Nigeria, for example, battle armed criminals. "Residents of Aba prefer *Bakassi Boys* to the police because of their 'jungle' (immediate) justice unlike the judicial procedure which takes a long time and may result in the guilty getting freedom . . . they prefer *Bakassi Boys* to the police on the premise that the boys do not collect bribes to free criminals" [Anon. 2000: 15]. In the Niger Delta, groups such as the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), and Egbesu Boys assert that they are protesting the failure of oil companies to compensate their communities for environmental damages, the unwillingness of the Nigerian Federal Government to share oil revenues with oil producing communities, and government human rights violations. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) advertises that it favors a separate Biafran state. These groups confront armed federal "task forces" that many local people regard as undisciplined and predatory occupying forces. Despite the election of a democratic civilian administration in Nigeria, one "task force" was blamed for the destruction in November 1999 of all but three buildings in Odi, a Bayelsa State town of 15,000, and the deaths of "dozens of civilians" [Human Rights Watch 1999: 3]. Earlier human rights violations generated over 11,000 petitions before the Oputa Commission, formed in 2000 to investigate past injustices against Nigerian citizens between 1966 and 1999. Most of these petitions come from the Niger Delta region, highlighting the huge volume of grievances in the region against the current political order [Ibrahim 2000: 2]. Extensive corruption in Nigeria's elected civilian government attracts public attention too. The legislative head of a major political party even confessed: "Majority of us cannot go home. You drive your NASS (National Assembly) car on the streets [and people] shout 'thief, thief'" [Onyeacholem 2000: 18].

A Delta region official spokesman labeled these groups as bandits: "It is clear to the state government that these youths are criminals who parade themselves as youth activists and their terrorist activities are hampering progress in the state" [Abugu 2000: 2]. In April 2000, paramilitary forces arrested Ledum Mitee, head of MOSOP, and police

attacked and partially razed buildings in K-dere, a Rivers State town. Youths have taken the lead in attacking installations of foreign oil producers, which they accuse of financing and arming regional paramilitaries [Montclos 1999]. By extension, these actions threaten to disrupt the exploitation of the resource that provides Nigeria's federal government with 95 percent of its revenues.

These groups at first glance appear to be excellent candidates to become revolutionary insurgencies, mobilizing local grievances and political demands in an indigenous political structure to replace corrupt and illegitimate rule. Eric Wolf observed (of rural revolutionaries) that "ultimately, the decisive factor in making a peasant rebellion possible lies in the relation of the peasantry to the field of power surrounding it," and they must have "fields of leverage" that give them access to resources to organize action against their oppressors [Wolf 1999: 290]. Group solidarity, autonomy and other organizational resources ought to be present in Nigeria, as in many African states where regimes are oppressive and place low priorities on state capabilities outside of arming groups, and thus have little to offer to average people.

Private Violence and Elite Political Competition

Closer examination of the "field of power," however, reveals numerous informal linkages between armed opposition groups and elite political networks. These linkages reinforce economic components of political relationships in the same way that patronage-based political authority integrates commerce into these relationships so that they are likely to become increasingly violent over time, whether subordinate individual participants prefer this or not. Investigation into the social origins of group members highlights this linkage. A journalist observes of the Bakassi Boys that "a good number of these boys were also used for some of the dirty jobs carried out during the Abacha reign of terror, and they are all moving about freely, ready for the highest bidder to engage their services" [Agekameh 2000a: 25]. Some vigilantes are demobilized soldiers that served in the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia and Sierra Leone. They allegedly return with weapons, which they either sell illegally to others or keep for their own purposes. Vigilante methods also suggest a link to Sierra Leone. A journalist notes that Bakassi Boys treat suspected criminals harshly, and that "judgment takes the form first of cutting off the hand from the elbow known as 'short sleeve' or from the shoulders known as 'long sleeve'," terminology used by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels against whom ECOMOG fights in Sierra Leone [*ibid.*: 24–25; Ubani 2000: 10]. The demobilization of paramilitaries and security agencies formed under the direction of General Sani Abacha's regime and his security advisor, Ismaila Gwarzo, also contributed to the weaponry and military skills available to these groups (Western Military Informant, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 Oct 2000). The Bakassi Boys even boast Biafran war (1967–70) veterans among their ranks

[Nzenwa 2000: 32].

Recent developments point to additional attachments between incumbent elites and vigilante groups. Governor Chimaroke Mbadinuju of Anambra State invited the Bakassi Boys to rid the commercial center of Onitsha of armed robbers, an invitation that the Abia State's government later extended to the group [Ojeme 2000: 1]. Armed robberies decreased in Onitsha as Bakassi Boys beheaded or torched suspects at the rate of five per day in early 2000. The Anambra State legislature legalized their activities under a "State Vigilante Service Committee" answerable to the Governor, while the Abia State government provided equipment [Agekameh 2000b: 23–27].

The services of the Bakassi Boys extend beyond fighting crime. The group allegedly killed Ikechukwu, a politician and businessman, and Nwosu-Igbo, an Abia State politician, and threatened to kill a member of the Anambra legislature before police intervened. Anambra Governor Mbadinuju justified the Bakassi Boys' actions, saying:

> They came to me and said that they have been looking for this man [legislator] . . . and that they had gone to his house to catch him because he [legislator] committed criminal offenses and I said no matter how highly placed a person is, anyone who is suspected of being an armed robber, we will bring him out and test him, so they [Bakassi Boys] tested him [legislator] as they normally test everybody and he didn't meet up with the test. [Onwubiko 2000: 11]

The detained legislator was also a member of an opposition party, and had earlier criticized the governor for corruption. But the governor was able to appropriate the language of anti-corruption to justify the Bakassi Boys' actions, stating that his opponent "showed undue loyalty to some 'money bags' who had sworn to destabalise state government" [Eke 2000: 8]. Likewise, the murdered Abia politician allegedly "made confessional statements acknowledging his misdeeds before he was killed" [Akparanta 2000: 17].

The group was implicated in other extra-judicial killings in the state, causing a local human rights organization to complain: "The sponsors, managers and advisors of vigilante group are in position to manipulate and use them as political tool for political interests" [Ebonyi State Human Rights Commission 2001: 2]. Elsewhere, the "ECOMOG" militia (named for the Nigerian expeditionary force in Sierra Leone and Liberia) in Yobe State found favor with the governor of that state. The governor's critics, however, claimed that the governor used the group as a tool to intimidate his political opponents [Ali 2000: 45]. Nonetheless, in both instances strongmen backers of vigilantes are able to use the specter of disorder and crime to justify their own forays into the world of violent politics. As a spokesman for the Anambra governor said when confronted with federal investigations into Bakassi Boys' deeds: "Robbers still lurk around waiting the slightest opportunity to strike. . . . Naturally where there is misunderstanding criminals will capitalize on it. We should all ensure that *Bakassi* is not destabilized" [Nweze 2001: 2].

The Anambra incident also pointed to a dispute between a local businessman, a mar-

ket management board, and motorcycle taxi regulators on one side and the state government backing a competing market association on the other. The kidnapped Anambra legislator was a partisan of the aggrieved commercial organizations that had lost the protection of their patron in state government during the 1999 election and transition to a civilian regime [Okebalama 2000: 11]. The detained opposition party legislator, however, had continued to defend the aggrieved groups' interest in the state legislature. Meanwhile, Bakassi Boys sided with the market association that supported the governor, and supported the motorcycle taxi (called "Okadas" after a local private airline) transport union, and engaged in battles against their rivals on their behalf, using these battles to attack and kill political activists who offended the governor or his supporters [Okoli 2001: 9].

The Abia incident, however, proved more threatening to the solidarity of the local Bakassi Boys group as "the leadership of the group was soon embroiled in a bitter tussle over who would take ownership of the sleek silver colour Mercedes Benz car belonging to Nwosu-Igbo" [Akparanta 2000: 7]. Abia Bakassi Boys there also have been accused of "being used to settle scores and delving into civil matters totally different from what they were established for" [Machie 2001: 12]. These incidents may have targeted individuals who some local people saw as corrupt or abusive of power. But from the point of view of organizing political alternatives, these activities hitched the wagon of fighting corruption to the horse of a particular faction that was willing to use violence for its own ends. The considerable violence surrounding Anambra politics also is likely to delegitimate the structures of Nigeria's post 1998 civilian government in the eyes of people who blame democracy for unleashing disorder and violent strongmen in their midst.

In contrast to these tight connections between Bakassi Boys and local elites, the OPC has become an important player in its own right in regional politics. Unlike Bakassi Boys, OPC was organized in the mid-1990s during the Abacha regime with the overt political agenda of launching a guerrilla war to fight in the interests of the Yoruba ethnic community. The group opposed the Abacha regime's non-recognition of the results of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, which M.K.O. Abiola, a Yoruba politician and businessman was widely considered to have won. Once Abacha was dead (and Abiola mysteriously died soon after) and his successors called for a return to civilian rule, OPC split into a moderate and a radical wing. Moderate leaders are more willing to work with the government of Olusegun Obasanjo, the elected civilian successor to Abacha's military regime. The leadership of the radical wing opposes collaboration with Obasanjo's government, and argues in favor of a wholesale renegotiation of southwestern Nigeria's relationship with the Nigerian federation, and keeps open the option of complete independence.

The OPC thus plays a role in a similar factional split within the Alliance for Democracy (AD), an opposition party that draws support from Yoruba voters in the country's southwest. This split reflects divisions among elites in the southwest of the country over how to deal with the political survival of politicians who had collaborated with the Abacha regime, and over how to respond to increasing pressures from legislatures to sub-

mit to investigations of misdeeds and corruption. This split harkens back to political divisions in the 1960s among politicians who argued for closer collaboration with elites from other regions of Nigeria, versus those who favored more autonomy for the southwest. OPC factional alignments also incorporate more enduring intra-Yoruba political splits, such as contention over appointment of a traditional leader in Ilorin (OPC supports a Yoruba claimant over a Fulani), a controversy that dates back to nineteenth century civil wars among Yoruba after the Fulani conquered Ilorin to make it an outpost of the Fulani Empire and a staging ground for carrying the jihad into Yorubaland [Ajayi 1974: 152–156]. These rivalries also find reflection in federal-level struggles between Northern elites (who have tended to be over represented in recent military regimes) and those who favor greater regional autonomy.

Thus OPC began as a group more closely linked to political issues and a particular political elite, in contrast to Bakassi Boys. Nonetheless, like Bakassi Boys, OPC groups align themselves with local market organizations on the basis of linkages to key politicians. Both factions of OPC have invaded market areas that are controlled by members of "outsider" ethnic groups [Olukunle 2000: 1–2; Alli 2000: 6]. These actions have led to very violent clashes with the Lagos Police Rapid Response Squad, resulting in over 300 deaths in clashes between OPC and police in 2000 (Author's tally from Nigerian press). OPC groups also target corrupt politicians and police for retribution as police are drawn in to deal with these conflicts. This element of OPC activity appears to tap grassroots political grievance, and not simply reflect commercial motivations on OPC's part. Reflecting widespread opinion in Lagos, "Kayoade Williams, a repentant armed robber now an evangelist, told TELL that behind armed robbers are influential people in the society, including police officers who themselves are beneficiaries of robbers' exploits" [Agekameh 2000a: 25]. These attacks create frictions between police and OPC member, and members of the police have been accused of staging reprisal attacks and extra-judicial killings.

But OPC members also claim: "There are policemen, SS men who are OPC members. There are highly placed members of the society, even government officials, who cannot openly identify with us" [Nzenwa 2000: 31]. The inconsistency of the Federal Government's announcement, then withdrawal, then renewal of bans on OPC suggests that this claim may have merit. Furthermore, the Lagos State House of Assembly endorsed OPC as a "legitimate anti-crime organization" during one of the announced crackdowns. These differences point to politicians' uses of OPC in battles between federal power and states, and between those who support the president and those who do not. Nigeria's police operate as a countrywide federal organization. Local politicians, on the other hand, found that OPC activities can play a role in advancing their own interests. Legislative opponents of the Lagos State governor, for example, have joined with the chairman of a faction of the Alliance for Democracy, the Yoruba cultural organization Afenifere, and Frederick Fasehun's faction of OPC to patrol Lagos communities, and "as a vote of no confidence in the Nigeria police" in a manner that "will force other [politicians] to remove themselves

from the fence on important issues in this country" [Ebosele 2000: 18].

The conflict with police, who belong to a federal agency, sheds light on information about the genesis of OPC. Its start can be traced to the rule of General Abacha, when some opposition forces in the southwest contemplated a guerrilla struggle against Abacha's plan to transform himself into a civilian ruler. Ultimately Abacha's mysterious nocturnal demise in June 1998 ended that plan. Yoruba politicians such as Lagos State governor, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, who had gone into exile in Benin to wage the struggle against Abacha, were left with armed youths, some who had been sent to Burkina Faso and elsewhere for military training. The end of Abacha's rule greatly improved prospects for these youths' benefactors, as they entered State Houses and assemblies. For some former benefactors, OPC members became burdens, yet these politicians were also indebted to OPC members for support during Abacha's term. Tinubu's strategy focused on efforts to set up a state-controlled police force that could absorb OPC in much as Anambra's governor created the "State Vigilante Service Committee" to absorb Bakassi Boys. Public and federal opposition, however, complicated Tinubu's plans, complicated by his own close attachment to politicians who now serve in the Federal Government. Meanwhile, the governor has had to remain quiet about OPC activities, signaling his connection, but not his ability to control them [Adekeye 1999: 29–30].

The result is that OPC is left with relatively greater autonomy than Bakassi Boys to refashion relations with politicians, and to develop a distinct political program. As with Bakassi Boys these political motivations and alliances are compatible with personal gain. Individual members find that they can use these alliances to gather personal wealth. In one instance, "an Igbo boy took his landlord to the court. In a reprisal revenge, his landlord invited the OPC men who visited the young man in the afternoon of Wednesday as he went home for lunch break and killed him accusing him of armed robbery!" [Nwachukwu 2000: 32]. OPC leaders appear to be considerably more sensitive to the public image of their organization than are their Bakassi Boys counterparts. Nonetheless, their Lagos area market invasions, which add an ethnic dimension to conflicts, are likely to benefit OPC members, or at least put economic opportunities at their disposal. These activities also show the difficulty of disentangling personal economic motivations, elite factional politics, and mass protest in the context of the collapse of state bureaucracies and politicians who use armed gangs to control economic opportunities to bolster their authority. These activities also show the extent to which the "civil society" groups that emerge in the context of Nigeria's democratization are drawn into these political conflicts and violence, destroying their autonomy from the politics they criticize.

Armed Gangs as Elements of State Collapse

Nigeria's elected civilian federal government has been unable to regulate the militariza-

tion of local factional politics. As noted above, federal authorities try to ban or regulate vigilante groups, but usually end up reversing their positions. No doubt federal politicians concluded that direct opposition to vigilante groups may further undermine political order, a condition under which they would have more to lose than would local opponents who are associated with violent groups and who attempt to carve out their own positions as patrons. Private violence in Nigeria also plays a role in a broader state-federal power struggle. Politics continues to be organized through informal networks which strongmen use to boost their capabilities as patrons through their abilities to control access to economic opportunities, whether in official markets, informal markets, or access to state assets for private gain. Now, state governors, local strongmen, and opposition politicians use violence in ways once reserved for whoever held the reins of power at the federal level. This mirrors the fragmentation of patronage politics in places like Liberia, Somalia and Congo, where state elites took advantage of the central patron's declining ability to control resources and force all others to appeal to him for these rewards.

This process of incorporation into more decentralized patronage networks takes people who are potentially social bandits in Wolf's terms and ties them to the interests of the elite that they criticize. This calls into question the meaning of revolt in the social setting of violent patronage-based politics. "Revolutionaries" are themselves creations of the state, whether as demobilized soldiers or as members of disbanded paramilitaries, or more indirectly, those who suffer the consequences of mis-governance and the destruction of economies. Originally that elite organized these young men for the interests of that elite. These are youths who find that they have few viable economic prospects in any case. But instead of fighting the political order that has done little to serve their interests, most appear willing to reintegrate into existing political networks, perhaps on better individual terms. This dynamic presents a collective action problem for potential revolutionaries and reformers, since they must contend with would-be followers who are anxious that if they do not align themselves with politicians who will permit them access to loot, others will get the goods before them, and leave them out in the harsh, destroyed economy of a failed state.

Armed, anti-government gangs in this context are thus not harbingers of rebellion. They represent maneuvers on the part of politicians and the "marginalized" to renegotiate (and force) their positions in the state, not some version of a state-society struggle that will lead to reform of politics or the renewal of society. This tendency is observed in other instances of state collapse. Jimmy Kandeh makes a similar argument for Sierra Leone. He explains how a political class there appropriated what he calls "lumpen" violence—the protests and social deviance of unemployed and marginalized young men who found little or no opportunity in the economy that Sierra Leone's elite had largely destroyed. Once the centralized political network began to fragment, "armed marginals," especially those in the army and paramilitaries, began to act on their own behalf or for freelancing politician strongmen [Kandeh 1996].

The Sierra Leone case differs somewhat in the degree to which "armed marginals" have been able to replace incumbent elites with themselves (though not without significant alliances with surviving politicians and strongmen). In any event, international norms prevent wholesale replacement of patrimonial elites with "marginals," which may force them to ally with local politicians or others who can legitimate (in foreign eyes) their claim to hold state power. Johny Paul Koroma, head of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), which allied with RUF rebels to seize the capital in May 1997, "The Junta" (as Sierra Leoneans called it) was unable to secure international recognition of sovereignty, and instead faced sanctions and eventual Nigerian intervention to dislodge them. Whether recognized as rulers or not, groups that Kandeh and others term "lumpen" show little interest in building bureaucratic administrations once in power, nor do they advertise a particular ideological perspective, at least as understood by outsiders. These factors, no doubt coupled with poor command of English, inhibit their claims to the mantle of sovereignty (though the 1997–98 rebel occupation of Freetown shows that recognition is by no means assured, even when articulate interlocutors can be recruited).

Sierra Leoneans recognize other features that RUF and AFRC insurgents share with Nigeria's youthful protestors. A Sierra Leonean journalist writes of two kinds of rebels, of "bush rebels" and "town rebels." "Bush rebels" are "made up of young and old people (including children), all under the influence of hard drugs and always shabbily dressed." His description of "town rebels" is more revealing:

> This is perhaps the largest category. . . . They are in constant help and communication with bush rebels. They are always neatly dressed and so are not easily identified. They live in towns, just next door to you. . . . They work for the established government. They work in offices close to the seat of the President. They are present in all spheres of work. Private businesses as well. Even in the churches and mosques. They are also always neatly dressed especially in coats and ties. This class of rebels are responsible for the ugly state (and pleasant state) you are today. . . . With just a signature they robbed your country of billions. They give you right when you are wrong and wrong when you are right. . . . [Nasralla 1999: 2]

The similarities of motivations for rebels and corrupt officials also appear in the statements of former RUF leader Foday Sankoh, a former Sierra Leone Army corporal. His justification for fighting is thus:

> Den say lef RUF lef fo mine diamond. . . . Why den nor bin tell Jamil or Shaki dat when APC bin de power? Una mine ya! We na RUF believe in wealth, arms en power na de people den hand. . . . We nor de lef we diamond or we gun gie nobody. And we go get de POWER jis nor! [They ask why RUF mines diamonds. Why didn't they ask Jamil (a businessman) or Shaki (former president) that when the APC was in power? Yeah, we mine! We in RUF believe in wealth, arms and power in the hands of the people. . . . We're not going to give up diamonds or our guns to anybody. And

this is how we will get POWER right now!] [Sankoh 2000: 3]

In fact, critics of corrupt regimes with more conventional oppositional ideologies typically do appear at the start of insurgent attacks. In Liberia, a very able commander associated with Charles Taylor's insurgency articulated a popular critique of Liberia's government under President Doe. Using his skills as a former US Marine, he successfully mobilized a multiethnic group of followers in the early stages of the war. An unproven local rumor held that Taylor found this individual's popularity and success in mobilizing followers to be a threat to his leadership. The popular commander was later shot under mysterious circumstances. Likewise, several University of Sierra Leone student radicals who left for exile in Libya trained with future commanders of the RUF and accompanied them back to West Africa at the start of the conflict. They had articulated a critique of official corruption while at the national university in the 1980s, but these individuals and their political program disappeared very early in the conflict [Abdullah and Muana 1998: 179]. The conflict in Congo also had its share of articulate, able local leaders who allied themselves with growing insurgencies, only to die in mysterious circumstances or leave the organization when they realized that they could not assert their political agendas.

This context of state collapse where economic opportunities are welded to the exercise of political authority offers little room for ideological insurgents to take time and resources to build support through administration of liberated zones. If the field of combat is crowded with well-armed gangs, most with little popular political appeal due to their previous associations, the ideological insurgent is at a tremendous military disadvantage. This is true in spite of the fact that corrupt government still generates the diversity of grievances that have always characterized misrule. Nor do political motivations necessarily disappear among those who fight. This author's conversations with RUF fighters in UN-held areas in Sierra Leone in mid-2000 indicated that fighters take seriously the Pan-Africanist messages in the music of artists such as Alpha Blony and Bob Marley, and that government failure, and appearance of unconcern about the provision of education are genuine concerns.

Former Yugoslavia offers important parallels to this process of state collapse, protest and private violence in Africa. Armed gangs, usually under the leadership of individuals who performed clandestine services for the collapsed regime, recruited followers from among economically marginalized youth. One gang leader, Zeljko Raznajatovic ("Arkan"), who headed the official fan club of Belgrade's soccer team after a career as a bank robber in Western Europe, organized a paramilitary group with close ties to Serb politicians. (Arkan was killed in Belgrade in 2000 in an attack allegedly linked to his position as head of an extensive clandestine business organization.) The Yugoslav army found that these groups' "primary motive was not fighting against the enemy but robbery of private property and inhuman treatment of Croatian civilians" [United Nations Commission of Experts 1994: para.100]. As in the cases above, armed groups often presented themselves

as protectors of a particular community, restorers of order (taking names such as "Ninjas" in the case of "Captain Dragan" in the Knin area), and punishers of corrupt politicians [Maas 1996: 21–22].

V.P. Gagnon makes the important observation that this context of violent opportunism results in a "political homogenization" that crowds out less violent, less self-interested political protest, and creates a situation in which otherwise passive individuals must seek protection from armed groups [Gagnon 1994/95]. This closely describes conditions in Nigeria, especially in the southwest and Delta regions, especially during Abacha years. In this instance, officials used armed proxies to create conflict between and within communities, leaving vulnerable groups in the position of having to flee or make a deal with a local protector—usually someone allied with the regime. Violence and the threat of violence in turn offered enterprising local officials a ready means of integrating themselves into larger patronage networks, and of settling local scores [Nwankwo 1997]. Chabal and Daloz refer to this as "disorder as political instrument," and is recognizable in other patrimonial regimes such as Kenya, under such terms as "strategies of tension," and "politics of survival" when political violence is used to reinforce personal rule in Uganda [Chabal and Daloz 1999].

Warfare in Central Africa illustrates the consequences of official use of disorder as a political instrument, and highlights the relevance of the Nigerian case for analyzing conflict in Central Africa. The war began in 1996 with a Rwandan intervention and recruitment of Congolese dissatisfied with the rule of Congo's (then Zaire's) president Mobutu. Insurgents then fragmented into competing factions, each backed by officials in neighboring countries or stronger factions within Congo. The social origins of these insurgencies resemble armed groups in Nigeria, as do their connections to existing political strongmen.

An anti-government militia, the Movement pour la Liberation du Congo (MLC), for example, draws fighters from among the paramilitary that protected former president Mobutu. As in Nigeria, politicians in then-Zaire armed young men to serve as private armies. These armed youth filled the ranks of the MLC, headed by Jean-Pierre Bemba, the son of Mobutu's business partner, Bemba Saolona (who has served in the government of Laurent Kabila, MLC's opponent) [Kasozi 1999]. Other groups such as the (occasionally) pro-government Forces de la Defense de la Démocratie (FDD) draw fighters from among Rwandans and Burundians in refugee camps in Congo and Tanzania who are opposed to governments in those countries. The Armée de Libération du Rwanda (ALiR) includes many fighters from the pre-1994 Rwandan government's "citizen militia" that attacked ethnic Tutsis and government critics in that country. ALiR receives support from local Mai Mai militias. Mai Mai dates from the 1960s, when it added cattle rustling and robbery to rural community self defense against government soldiers. Mai Mai now draws youths from urban areas who are apparently attracted by the same mix of economic and political motives that invigorate their Nigerian counterparts.

Congo's President Laurent Kabila, himself a former Mai Mai leader and eventually a

cross-border clandestine market commodities trader, apparently recognized the uses of private militias to undermine his adversaries. Mai Mai operates among anti-government insurgents in eastern Congo, but reportedly received some aid from Kabila's government [Human Rights Watch 2000], though at the time of writing it was unclear whether this aid would continue under his successor (and son), Joseph. Kabila senior had appointed former Mai Mai fighters to prominent positions in his army, including to the post of commander. Nonetheless, while Mai Mai occasionally allies with groups like ALiR and FDD, elements of it also coexist with anti-government insurgents, and occasionally battle pro-government groups in a manner that appears related more to issues of local defense and economic opportunities rather than broad ideological motives or political programs (Author's observation in region).

The Dominance of Economic Motivations in Insurgencies

The consequence of militarized state and patronage network collapse is that those with the most well developed commercial contacts from the previous regime are likely to be the best-armed insurgents—and also the most fearful of mobilizing political appeals. In this context, the most successful insurgents, from the point of view of attracting backing from strongmen and beating rivals are extreme violence. This will serve to intimidate rival claimants to these commercial resources, and a signal openness to potential followers who are also primarily motivated by economic gain.

Thus typical followers of warlords are young men (and some young women) who use warfare and violent political competition to enrich themselves. They are often the most vigorous segments of most societies, yet also the most marginalized in collapsing economies in corrupt states. Many conclude that the possession of a gun and the support of a local strongman backer offer them the best chance to remedy their marginal status. The economic interest is therefore welded to the political. Economic relief, settling scores, and acting against local injustices becomes compatible with serving the political ambitions of patrons. A Nigerian observes this fusion of economic and political aims in Bakassi Boys: "Warlords may be used to eliminate creditors, opponents, rivals, enemies or just persons who are not liked by others" [Ezeife 2000: 12]. This does not, however, create an autonomous basis for building alternative "liberated zones" or a distinct vision of a new political future.

Local fighters may have any number of grievances that could become instrumental, depending upon the overall context of the conflict. They may also have hated the government from which their new patron once hailed and are able to articulate a sophisticated critique of its politics. They may recognize that the success of their insurgency will not bring economic development and peace. But they may also conclude that it is safer in the present to be associated with those with guns rather than be the victim of the same, and

the personal gain may not be inconsequential. A refugee from Liberia's war in the 1990s described the impact of youthful fighters on others as "a condition in which the fear of death and humiliation puts the genuine adults and achievers into their shells. The vacuum is then filled by the young ones who became dare devils, not caring about death or any related end. For them, chance (and not age, valuable time and energy) creates material wealth" [Nagbe 1996: 53].

Not all join insurgents who prey upon their own communities. Conflicts in almost all of the cases above contain examples of locally organized home guard units, religious organizations that become armed, and all sorts of indigenous efforts to defend communities. An additional resource for warlord insurgents, however, is that their superior weaponry and capacity to cause disorder makes them the focus of international attempts at mediation. This recognition strengthens them, since participation in negotiations is the key to eventually claiming State House and getting diplomatic recognition of their status as a ruler of a state. Government officials-turned-warlords usually speak a European language, do not look out of place in a suit, and appear like the sort of person that diplomats encounter on a regular basis. In contrast, home guard leaders may speak only indigenous languages, dress in ways that are considered inappropriate in a diplomatic meeting, and not possess the capacity to disrupt agreements to the extent that warlords do.

When outsiders become involved as mediators of conflict, leaders of economic insurgents accordingly find that they can convince outsiders of their claim to power, provided that they can capture the country's capital or convince outsiders that they or their patrons should be included in power-sharing arrangements. This leads to continued private exploitation of local commercial resources and looting opportunities, supplemented with external resources as part of "post-conflict reconstruction" efforts. In Sierra Leone, for example, the 1999 Lome Agreement left Revolutionary United Front insurgents in a position to more efficiently mine diamonds in territory they held, coupled with greater international tolerance of RUF leader Foday Sankoh's diamond selling forays abroad. In "peace," as in war, this category of insurgent shows no interest in administering areas they controlled. For example, international recognition of Liberia's Charles Taylor as president of Liberia after a 1997 agreement and election allowed Taylor to violently remove his rivals. It gave him the legal standing to sign agreements with a large Malaysian timber operation to generate more income. As during the war (but now more efficiently) Taylor converts the country's remaining rain forests into cash under his personal control, and uses it to buy guns, fend off rivals, and tap economic opportunities in neighboring states.

A consequence of such a peace is that it hobbles efforts of more politically motivated critics of corruption and misrule. It consolidates the warlords' control over states and renders nearly futile any expectation that these states will develop administrative apparatuses, or even the slightest interest in controlling the exploitation of economic opportunities, a direction in which Nigeria appears to be moving, in spite of its recent transition to civilian rule at the level of formal politics.

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