

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

When Ethnic Loyalty Dies: Biafrans Feared Biafra in the New Independence Struggle

Bello, Taiwo

Ph.D. Candidate, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Abstract:

For almost two decades, there had emerged two new organizations furthering the agitation for Biafra's independence from Nigeria. The first is Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in 1999, while the second is the recently constituted Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2015. Their emergence, however, reveals some surprising realities about the Biafrans which contradict what they (Biafrans) were known for when the struggle began in the 1960s. The recent movements are characterized by internal cracks, frictions, and divisions, qualities which are unhealthy for any ethnic group agitating for its own separate space or territory. Using newly discovered primary sources, this paper examines the rationales behind the disagreements and divisions amongst Biafrans over Biafra's separation from Nigeria. It argues that those Biafrans who disagreed with these organizations, particularly IPOB, were of the belief that IPOB's struggle was 'misplaced', unbeneficial, and perhaps, politically motivated rather than ethnicity.

1. Introduction

Africa is one of the most ethnically-diverse continents in the world. And Nigeria, aside being the most populous nation on the black continent, 'has about 374 ethnic groups that are broadly divided into ethnic 'majorities' and 'minorities'. The major ethnic groups are Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast' (Mustapha 2009: iv). It is therefore, with this, evident that the Igbo-speaking people, identified as Biafrans, remain 'key-holders' or 'stake-holders' in the affairs of Nigeria. The Biafrans are illustrious, hardworking, and enterprising. Aba, in Abia state within the Biafra region, is one of the biggest and largest markets for diverse commercial products, most of which are made by the Biafrans. The Biafrans are generally active, creative, and a number of them have contributed immensely to the economic, socio-cultural, and political development of Nigeria. Additionally, the Biafrans are brave as till this moment, they remain the only ethnic group in Nigeria that could summon courage, mobilize members, gather arms and ammunition to engage in combat with the Nigerian Armed Forces in their demand for an independent state of Biafra between 1967-1970, a war which had been argued to be motivated by the presence of oil in the then Eastern Nigeria (Uche 2008). Though this battle ended with victory on the side of Nigeria, the flames of anger, animosity, and hatred for Nigeria, or perhaps, its post-war governance style, still germinate in the minds and souls of a high number of Biafrans, especially those who experienced the war (Achebe 2012), and the generations of Biafrans that were born years after Biafra's surrender, but fortunate enough to obtain stories and information about the war through their historically-conscious parents and forebears.

Armed with information about Nigeria's relations with Biafrans, details which sometimes were 'damaging' and 'inciting' (Jeyifo 2013), majority of southeastern indigenes had organized themselves into 'formidable' groups such as MASSOB and IPOB amongst others, to further the agitation for Biafra secession from Nigeria. The goal of these organizations, however, did not appeal to generality of Biafrans as many of them had taken to the media to criticize, denounce, and dissociate themselves from the organizations, especially IPOB. This paper investigates the reasons for the divergent views by Biafrans over the secession goal or struggle by the IPOB. It argues that those Biafrans currently in disagreement with these organizations, particularly IPOB, were of the belief that IPOB's struggle was a 'misplaced' struggle, unbeneficial, and perhaps, politically motivated rather than ethnicity. This paper is divided into three broad and detailed sections. The first examines the responses of Biafrans to the activities of IPOB, as well as IPOB's reactions in defense of its stands and positions. The second introduces panaceas which could promote peaceful existence and understanding among IPOB, Biafrans and Nigeria. The last offers conclusion to this paper.

2. Ijob and Responses of Biafrans

Africa is known to be a veritable platform for ethnic violence. Most of such violence are provoked by perceived political and economic marginalization, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and failure of governmental or states' policies in the equitable delivery of resources amongst the ethnic groups present within their boundaries or territories. Ethnicity, largely, is known to unite people who share similar belief, thought, cultural and traditional background or lineages against the outside forces capable of preventing them from actualizing their potential goals as a people. Such outside forces could be rival ethnic groups, the state, or a repressive and

suppressive external system experienced by the majority of the people found within the global north during the eras of colonialism and imperialism.

The Mau Mau Revolt, 1952-1960 (Adebola 1981; Osborne 2015), the Biafra war, 1967-1970 (Falola and Ezekwem 2016), the Rwandan crisis, 1994 (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014), and the ongoing violence in South Sudan which has led to the displacement of millions of South Sudanese across Africa and beyond had ethnic roots. And despite the incessant killings of the Kikuyu people by the repressive system of the British, the Biafrans by the Nigerian Armed Forces, and the Tutsi by the Hutus in Rwanda, the victimized ethnic groups stuck to their promise, belief, and ambition until the end. They were propelled and encouraged to keep on fighting because of their strong ethnic allegiance. Similar allegiance by groups of people who considered themselves as bounded by one language, culture, tradition and ancestor had been displayed in other parts of the globe, especially the eastern Europe where there are equally large number of ethnic minorities and majorities as can be found in Africa today.

The emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has, however, led one to begin to rethink, and at the same time, question whether there is truly uniting force in ethnic belonging. The claim by IPOB, on its appearance onto the Nigerian national scene, and arguably, global terrain, was that it existed to represent and defend the interests of all Biafrans, or better still, Igbo ethnic group present in Nigeria through agitation for Biafra's secession. Hence, its desire to be considered as an embodiment of freedom, autonomy, emancipation, and justice for the Biafrans. While secession was considered by the IPOB and its supporters, both young and old, male and female, as the only means through which the Igbo ethnic group could liberate itself from the 'oppression' and 'marginalization' within Nigeria, majority of Biafrans, instead of joining the IPOB to agitate for secession, had criticized the organization and openly declared their intentions to remain within Nigeria. This development had resulted into the hurling of abusive utterances, hostilities, threats, and confrontations between the two schools of thoughts within the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria.

One of Biafra indigenes who had never hid their aversion and lack of support for the IPOB and even had to go to the extent of criticizing and denouncing the organization in the public spheres was Charles Oputa, a famous Nigerian entertainer and socio-political activist. Oputa had, during one of the several interview sessions, vehemently denounced the struggle for the actualization of state of Biafra. As he mentioned without mincing words, 'I would like to say for the umpteenth time, that, I am not in support and will never be in support of a country to be called Biafra. However, I am a Biafran at heart, period' (Sahara Reporters, April 20, 2017). Oputa was of the view that the actions and activities of the IPOB might provoke reactions from the Nigerian government, and if not carefully resolved or handled amicably, it might lead to another bloody war, similar to the one fought in the 1967-1970. Furthermore, he was concerned that should war happen, the innocent Biafran citizens would be the victim as many of them would definitely lose their lives in the process. Hence, for the avoidance of any incidence of blood-shedding in the country, it would be wise for the IPOB to shelve aside the cravings for an independent state of Biafra because, as a witness to the war in the 1960s, the Igbo people paid a price no tribe or ethnic group should pay, especially with the sights of Biafrans dying as a result of hunger and starvation on daily basis during the course of the war. This position is clear with the statement, 'now people are shouting Biafra but I say they don't know what they are talking about. Experience is the best teacher but those of us that experienced Biafra war know this is a foolish venture'. The 'foolish venture' was used to admonish and alert the IPOB leaders and supporters of how risky and dangerous it was for the Biafrans to agitate for the actualization of an independent state for Biafra at the time. And to let them realize further the implications of their actions on the lives and security of the Biafrans living in Nigeria, he narrated his personal experience of the war that began in 1967, 'During the war, my village was like the war theatre and I saw people dying per second all around me. There was death everywhere...Such sights have never left me. I was about 17 year old then, and now somebody is shouting 'Biafra'. No' (The Vanguard, January 29, 2017).

As stated above, war, to him, would not be an option. This was because a large number of Biafrans would suffer the grave consequences that could result from it such as hunger, mass and untimely death and so on. He was therefore disappointed that majority of those Biafrans clamouring for an independent Biafra state under the aegis of IPOB had not learnt from their past. In his view, agitation for a state of Biafra was a misplaced priority because the southeast (Biafra) had not been developed to a point where it could provide the equal or similar levels of opportunities the Biafrans could access within Nigeria. To this end, he advised the Biafra agitators thus, 'if the people shouting Biafra are serious, they should go back to the South-east to develop the region. After we must have developed the South-East, then we can be shouting Biafra (The Guardian, January 29, 2017).

Developing the southeast should be the first priority of the Biafrans. If the southeast had been developed to a point where it could create jobs and other opportunities that could ameliorate and elevate the conditions of the ordinary Biafra citizen, then the struggle for actualization of the state of Biafra would be reasonable and appealing to the generality of Biafrans home and abroad. As could also be seen, no one would subscribe to going to war without the hope of having something to feed on. In his observation, majority of those Biafrans who were clamouring for the separation of Biafra were not economically and financially buoyant to be able to afford the execution of war against Nigeria which could gather resources and mobilize its army to fight in any battle whenever it wished. His submission pointed to the fact that the Igbo were not ripe to have a separate nation to be known as 'Biafra' because it lacked what it required to be recognized and identified as an independent state. Hence, until those qualities of an independent state had been put in place, Biafra would remain a mirage.

Furthermore, Churchill Okonkwo, in his article titled, 'Nigeria is Broken, but Biafra is not the Answer' published May 2017, also decried the IPOB in its agitation for an independent state of Biafra, although he made it clear that Nigeria had its own peculiar problems strong enough to have propelled any ethnic group to opt for a breakaway from her. Among such ills and vices, he noted was the prevalent level of corruption among the holders of the public or political offices in the country. Despite this, however, agitation for Biafra state was not the solution, as this could generate more problems for Nigeria and the Biafrans themselves, 'as dysfunctional as Nigeria is, Biafra is not the answer' (Okonkwo, Naij.com, May 2017). Okonkwo's position remained that the union between Nigeria and Biafra was for the good of both, but if Biafra should be carved out of Nigeria, the Biafrans would have more to lose than Nigeria.

As he added using hunger and some recent economic experiences as points of reference, ‘a simple glitch in the production and distribution of tomatoes in 2016, everyone started trembling’ (Okonkwo, Naij.com, May 2017). The reality he was painting is that every region in Nigeria had its own peculiar strength needed by the other regions to survive. The north is known as the hub of agricultural productions especially pepper, tomatoes, groundnuts, yam tuber, and some fruits consumed by millions of Nigerians, rich and poor, on daily basis. The southeast is also rich in mineral resources, the south-south is rich in oil resources especially the Niger Delta areas, and the southwest is among the agricultural and corporate zones of the country. In the light of these, each region or ethnic group had something peculiar to offer which the rest might not have the comparative advantage to deliver. Hence, each ethnic group would have a lot more to benefit in terms of accessing goods which it could not produce within its region by staying and living in Nigeria as one, irrespective of their ethnic or tribal affiliations.

The tomato glitches (mentioned by Okonkwo) of 2016, which led to its scarcity and skyrocketed prices of the few tomatoes in circulation as of the time, brought to the fore the reality that the survival of Nigeria and its citizens could only be possible through the united existence of the various ethnic groups in the country. This was because the lack of inflow of tomatoes from the north into the other parts of the country got every ethnic group lamenting about the incidence, even though it lasted for just few weeks. This development alone generated national uproar and within weeks, life was already becoming uncomfortable and unbearable for many Nigerians, until the government took actions by convening panels of experts who devised solution to what was described as ‘tomato ebola’ (Premium Times, May 24, 2016; CNN, May 25, 2016; The Guardian, May 24, 2016), borrowing the term ‘Ebola’, an health crisis which hits some countries in West Africa, including Nigeria, between 2014 and 2015, and led to the demise of many people across the countries of Nigeria, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (New York Times, Nov. 3, 2016; WHO, January 14, 2016). The stability of Nigeria and Nigerians therefore lie in the maintenance of one ethnic unity and identity across the country.

And as a way of calling the spade what it truly was, or putting the word straight to his fellow Biafrans, Okonkwo spelt out what would happen if Biafra eventually became independent from Nigeria. Inshort, he maintained that higher challenges would be experienced by Biafrans in their new state ‘Biafra’ than they were experiencing within Nigeria, ‘within our ‘new Biafra’, there would be intra-ethnic squabble. Some some-groups within the Igbo speaking nationalities would be shocked to suddenly realize that they are not Igbos, and as a matter of fact, don’t speak ‘Igbo’. He continued by emphasizing the consequences of Biafra’s break away on the relations among Biafrans. Specifically, he stated what happens to those who ‘don’t speak Igbo’ should IPOB succeed in its bid for Biafra. In his words, such groups ‘will become the new minorities that will face ‘marginalization’ in the new Land of the Rising Sun. Ethnic stereotyping will be targeted at these new minority group’ (Okonkwo, Naij.com, May 2017). Aside from showing that there would definitely be some wrangling amongst the Biafrans triggered by ethnic marginality, he further revealed the states that would be hit the most in the following quotation:

→ ‘The Nsukka ethnic nationalities and the Ebonyi-Abakaliki groups will be hit first. The ‘Nwa Nsukka’ and ‘Umu Abakaliki’ derogatory characterization as second and sometimes third-class Igbo citizens will resurface. How the ‘Nwa Nsukka’ and ‘Umu Abakaliki’ who are currently spearheading the fight for actualization of Biafra will respond remains to be seen’ (Okonkwo, Naij.com, May 2017).

Some striking revelations were made with these statements. Firstly, the above showed that the claims by the IPOB toward ethnic unity and oneness remains a farce and deceptive weapon to attract supporters or followers. As a result, the level of ethnic marginalization they claimed to be experiencing in Nigeria would be nothing compared to what would happen among the Igbo in their ‘Biafra Republic’. The second revelation was the ethnic classifications amongst the Igbo groups. The fact that some groups were being referred to as second and third-class citizens by fellow Igbo while in Nigeria had the possibilities of raising questions as to what would eventually happen to these groups of people should Biafra become a reality. These people would become the new victims and minorities in Biafra and they would suffer the consequences of their agitations for the independence or a separate state for Biafra in the first place. Overall, therefore, remaining within Nigeria would serve the interests of such groups of people than joining and supporting the Biafra’s dream.

Additionally, also refusing to join the Biafra struggle was the Publicity Secretary of the ruling party in Nigeria, the All Progressive Congress (APC), Lagos Chapter, Mr. Joe Igbokwe. In his address to the leader of IPOB, Igbokwe made it clear that the incarceration of Nnamdi Kanu and the pains he experienced in the Kuje Prison must have signaled to him that majority of the Biafrans were not in support of a separate state for Biafra. He therefore advised Nnamdi Kanu and his supporters to drop their agitations for Biafra because the dream would never be realized or materialize. He was reported to have admonished the IPOB leader with the following words, ‘Now that he (Nnamdi Kanu) has been granted bail, he should just quietly go home and rest. We Are not a candidate of Biafra. The so-called Biafra is too small for us. We all built this country’. He ends his admonition with a striking statement, ‘How can you go for a small pond when you have an Atlantic ocean?’ (Daily Post, April 27, 2017).

This was a stern warning to the Biafrans. Igbokwe’s position aligned with that of Oputa and Okonkwo, though Oputa was lenient in his approach as he gave the room and possibility for the actualization of the Biafra dream only if the southeast could develop its region to become economically viable and vibrant like what could be obtained in Nigeria. Igbokwe did not mince word or pat the Biafra agitators on the back with his submissions. He considered Biafra as lacking everything there was in Nigeria. Hence, it was too ‘small’ to contain or harbor the dreams and aspirations of all peoples of Biafra origin. His point about the Igbo being great contributors to the growth and development of Nigeria can also not be questioned. The Biafrans could be described as very illustrious, ambitious, creative and hardworking. They dominate different sectors, alongside the Yoruba and Hausa, of the Nigerian economy. They remain major players in the Nigerian movie and entertainment industry, Nollywood, which is one of the greatest revenue generating sectors in the country. It would therefore, in his view, with all these efforts and contributions by the Igbo, be unreasonable and unwise for them to leave everything behind on their way to joining the newly established ‘Biafraland’ whose future seemed bleak. His emphasis in his

conclusion was even more striking. He warned Nnamdi Kanu and his supporters to give up the agitation for Biafra because 'the agitation has no political or economic sense. It is a hopeless agitation that we are not interested in. It is a collection of illiterates' (Daily Post, April 27, 2017).

The IPOB's struggle seemed not to have been considered as representing the aspirations and yearnings of the Biafrans as mentioned by Igbokwe. The struggle was regarded as a selfish rather than selfless, hence could not be said to have been constituted in defense of the desire and interests of the generality of the Igbo ethnic group. The word 'illiterate' could also mean that the agitators were not learned enough to understand the history of Igbo relations with the rest of other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the extent to which the sweat of the Igbo had helped Nigeria to grow and develop to the stage it was, the incidences and developments that led to the confrontations between Nigeria and the Biafrans known as the Biafra War, 1967-1970, and the implications of secession on the political and economic opportunities of the Igbo people. This admonition is somewhat similar to that of Charles Oputa earlier mentioned in this work. He (Igbokwe) had also challenged and sternly warned his fellow Igbo brothers and sisters to jettison ethnic labelling, distinction, biases and discrimination as such would not help the cause and conditions of the people of Biafra race (Sahara Reporters, May 9, 2017). Though, from all indications, Igbokwe belonged to the ruling party whose stability and security was being threatened by the agitations of the IPOB, hence, it was natural for him to denounce any activities and actions that could pose threat to the government. However, from his submission, he made some genuine points which deserved the attention of the Biafran agitators if truly they had the collective interests of Biafrans at heart, especially with his emphasis that the Biafrans would have more to lose by parting ways with Nigeria.

With these utterances, Igbokwe got a rejoinder and was attacked by the staunch members of IPOB. Kanayo Nwogwugwu, one of the IPOB leaders, reeled out the attacks on Igbokwe. In the words of Nwogwugwu, Igbokwe had made:

→ 'thoughtless and reckless statements aimed at pleasing his paymasters from the Southwest. The likes of Igbokwe should bury his head in shame for describing the Biafra project as hopeless and the IPOB supporters as illiterates. If he doesn't rein in his caustic tongue, we may be forced to restrict him to his newfound land and banish him from setting his foot on Igboland' (Daily Post, April 27, 2017).

Igbokwe's statements must have irked and provoked angry reactions from the supporters of IPOB. He was, according to Nwogwugwu, considered as being used by the political forces in the southwest against his own people. As a result, he might face the consequence of being restricted or banished from his own ancestral land in the southeastern Nigeria. This was just a threat, therefore, seem unrealistic and unrealizable by the members of IPOB because the individual involved (Igbokwe) remains a key figure amongst the Biafrans. But again, even though Igbokwe's statement might have some political undertone as he belonged to the ruling party against whom the IPOB agitates, his submissions were valid.

Further, there had also been some allegations that the governor of Anambra state, one of the major states controlled by Biafrans, was against the IPOB's struggle for an independent state of Biafra and as a result, had commissioned the killings of his subjects or citizens in his state. The governor, Willie Obiano, was described by the IPOB members as non-tolerant of anything that had to do with IPOB. His major goal, as they alleged, was to exterminate every single Biafran that had the guts and audacity to display his or her support for independent state of Biafra in the public spheres across the state. In the report released by the IPOB, Obiano was accused to have arrested some IPOB members and took them 'to Awka, to execute them and use decomposition chemical to conceal his inhumanity' (IPOB, May30 Bulletin, April 7, 2016).

This was a very strong allegation against a governor who got voted into power by those he was alleged to be executing. It might be plausible that while ensuring that the activities of the IPOB, especially protests, did not interrupt the daily go-about and activities of the rest of the people within the state on the said that, the military or security agents in Anambra released bullets on some members of the IPOB. It is, however, not convincing enough for a governor to launch a death trap for his own citizens and subjects to the extent that he would use destructive chemical weapons against them when the struggle had not advanced into civil war ethnic violence. Another important observation with regard to Obiano's reactions and responses to the activities of IPOB remains that apart from the fact that the protesting and chanting of the states of Biafra within the Anambra state under his watch had some security implications, the governors of the southeastern states seemed not to be in support of this struggle from the onset. One of the main rationale for this is not unrelated to political power or politics. The southeastern leaders must have realized that if they gave their support to the IPOB and eventually the state of Biafra was realized, there would be a new struggle for political power amongst them, because the IPOB members would first position themselves in the key offices including presidency within the new state, hence, stripping the governors of their hard-earned political influence and clouts. In view of this, it was therefore politically wise to maintain the existing political relations of the southeast with Nigeria by ensuring that those who were agitating for Biafra secession got silenced or denounced.

Obiano could not have been said to be advancing the agenda of the Buhari-led administration which the majority of IPOB members had criticized on many fronts because, unlike his colleague, Rochas Okorocha, the governor of Imo State, he does not belong to the ruling party. Obiano's Party remains the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), a party that was formed by the late Odumegwu Ojukwu, who led the Biafrans to war in 1967 until their surrender in 1970. Obiano's attitude toward the IPOB, contrary to the allegations by the IPOB, might be for the purpose of maintaining the security of the state as well as preventing any actions or activities that could limit or threaten his political authority within the southeast region, and Nigeria as a whole.

The highly-revered group of Igbo elders known as Ohanaeze Ndigbo, a socio-cultural group (Vanguard, March 22, 2017), had also denounced IPOB's struggle for secession in favour of the restructuring of Nigeria. In the statement released by this group of Igbo leaders after their meetings in April 2017, they made it known that secession was not the choice of the Igbo ethnic group, hence, the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, should drop his agitations as it would do no good to the Biafrans. Presenting the position of the Ohanaeze was the Deputy National Publicity Secretary, Mr Chuks Igbegu. In his submission, he stated categorically their objection to secession.

According to him, 'Ohanaeze intends to make to understand and appreciate its position, which is restructuring of the country rather than secession. Ohanaeze's position is restructuring, his (Kanu's) position is secession'. He further affirmed thus, 'we will not let him drop his desire for self-determination, but we will make him understand that Ohanaeze's position is the position of the Igbo people' (Daily Post, April 30, 2017). According to the collective decisions of the Igbo elders known as Ohanaeze, IPOB did not qualify as an embodiment of the wishes of the Igbo people. The struggle for Biafra's independence was misplaced, hence, it needed to be dropped by Nnamdi Kanu and his supporters. It was even clear from the statement that the Ohanaeze were ready to do anything they could to frustrate the ambitions of IPOB and its leaders. The only solution to the challenges facing Nigeria and its people was identified by the Ohanaeze as corruption, and this could only be addressed through dialoguing and restructuring, and not secession or self-determination. The Igbo leaders were determined to ensure that they called upon the leadership of Nigeria for the purpose of actualizing the proposed restructuring project, but first, the agitators must abdicate their positions and see reasons with the generality of the Igbo, especially their elders whose words were often regarded as 'filled with wisdom'.

The collective decisions by the Ohanaeze had been refuted and criticized by the IPOB as unreasonable and unpatriotic. The organization had blamed the challenges of the Igbo and IPOB members on the lack of support and patriotism of the members of the Ohanaeze Ndigbo. And while putting straight their response to the Ohanaeze, they mentioned that the Biafra project must be actualized. In other words, it was Biafra or death! and to the Ohanaeze, the IPOB had this to say through their Radio Biafra transmission, 'Ohanaeze Ndigbo should understand that Nnamdi Kanu is under an OATH to restore Biafra or his entire family would be wiped out. Nnamdi Kanu did not go to prison because he wanted Nigeria to be restructured, rather for Biafra' (RadioBiafra, May 2, 2017). They continued their attacks on the Ohanaeze affirming that 'those that were killed in Aba, Onitsha, Nkpor, Asaba, and Igweocha did not die because they wanted Nigeria to be restructured rather for Biafra'. As a result, 'Biafra is bigger than the Igbos and their (Ohanaeze's) greedy quests to satisfy their pockets would never curtail Biafra to become a thing of the Igbos' (RadioBiafra, May 2, 2017).

The IPOB agitators had lost hope and confidence in the Ohanaeze, just like the Ohanaeze had expressed their lack of interest and support for the goals and missions of the IPOB. Each of them had the right to maintain whatever position it considered ideal, though the path towards restructuring Nigeria as suggested by the Ohanaeze might not yield the expected fruit, not only for the Biafrans, but the generality of Nigerians.

The issue of restructuring had been on the tongues of the various successive leaders of the country with no positive action or result emanating from the talks and dialogues. In 2014, a national conference known as CONFAB was constituted under the administration of former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, for the purpose of addressing the issues affecting the country and proffering lasting solution at the conference. The conference which lasted for weeks held in grand style, experts from all walks of life were invited for contributions, and in the end, a policy document was developed. Those recommendations have not been implemented for the benefit of Nigerians till this moment (Vanguard, August 1, 2014; Premium Times, August 21, 2014; Vanguard, August 25, 2014). There is no dispute about the fact that restructuring is needed in Nigeria, but the leaders of the country need to have the political will to implement and execute policies in the overall interests of their citizens. This, as always, remains one of the things that had held the country backward for several years. And while the reports of the last CONFAB had not been implemented, the political elites had begun to agitate for another national conference tailored towards restructuring (The Guardian, May 12, 2017).

Additionally, as regard the oath sworn by Nnamdi Kanu to win independence for Biafra by all means, only time would tell whether this was done in good faith or it was just a ploy to attract the attention and gain the allegiance of the members of his organization. The latter, however, might be the case or main explanation for this purported oath taking. Although, at the meeting with the members of Eastern Consultative Assembly on May 9, 2017, Nnamdi Kanu renewed his pledge to actualize a state of Biafra during his lifetime, 'I desire Biafra. I want Biafra. I want nothing else other than Biafra. That was what I was born to do, and that is what I will do till the day Biafra will come'. He further touched on the need to free his people as his utmost goal which must be achieved at all cost, 'I have chosen the option that we must be free as a people, that we must be liberated as a race, and that we must have every God-given freedom due to us. I would not want to go to heaven to experience it. I want to experience it here' (Nnamdi Kanu, Punch, May 9, 2017). As the battle and trading of words rages between the IPOB and its opponents, especially Biafrans who had declared their support for a united Nigeria and the government of Nigeria, one would have no choice but to patiently wait and behold on whose side the trees of victory would finally fall. But what is certain (judging from the recent happenings and developments across the country and levels of interactions among its ethnic groups) remains that the Igbo people would not want to tow the lane of engaging in any physical conflict or armed confrontation with the Nigerian Armed Forces at any time considering the huge loss they suffered during the war in 1967-1970. We must, however, not risk by concluding or ruling out the possibility of armed confrontation as Nnamdi Kanu had threatened war against Nigeria at different occasions using statements such as 'we need guns and we need bullets. We know now that the best way to defend ourselves is to be armed' (Freeman, Telegraph, January 21, 2017). If war eventually happens, then the Biafrans must be ready to pay another round of sacrifice, though this possibility remains a mirage or an illusion at this time.

These agitations may possibly end on the roundtable of diplomatic chats between the Nigerian government and the IPOB leaders, hence, the loss of the hope for actualizing the state of Biafra for the second time, as the government had successfully done with the Niger Delta Militants (Premium Times, May 29, 2016), and the Boko Haram insurgents which had resulted into the release of 82 of the girls abducted at Chibok, Borno State, on May 7, 2017 (Reuters, May 8, 2017; BBC News, May 7, 2017; CNN News, May 7, 2017). Another development that signals the possibility that the IPOB might abdicate its position is that since the release of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, from the Kuje Prison on April 25, 2017, he had visited and been 'romanticizing' with politicians both those belonging to the ruling and opposition parties in the country. The most recent among such visits was the one paid by him to a former Vice President and Biafran, Alex Ekwueme who was the first elected vice president in the country, and was in the office from 1979-1983

before the government was overthrown in 1983 by the Buhari's administration, on May 10, 2017. At the meeting, Nnamdi Kanu was quoted saying he would accede to whatever advice given to him by the former vice president, Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme. In his word, 'I have come here to brief my father as to why we do what we do and to get his blessing; anything he tells me is what we are going to do, in so far as it advances our political course as a people' (Daily Post, May 10, 2017). This shows that IPOB is more politically conscious than ethnic as it claims, though these two can hardly be separated as they influence each other. Further, the statement by Kanu speaks volumes of what might happen to IPOB and its goal in the near future. Going by his statement, implies, in all ramifications, that if Ekwueme advises that he should drop the agitation for a state of Biafra and explore other diplomatic channels that would advance the political course of the Biafrans while remaining part of Nigeria, he would definitely not hesitate doing so. On the other hand, Ekwueme, in his response or reaction, said, 'it is a pleasure for me to receive him. I will make my best counsel in his onus task of leading an agitation that is committed to maintenance of justice and equity among all peoples, especially our people' (Vanguard, May 10, 2017). With this statement, Ekwueme did not consider this engagement as an easy one, hence the best advice he would likely give might be for the IPOB to channel their energies into some other areas that would create more opportunities and advance the hopes of the Igbo while living in Nigeria. More so, him (Ekwueme) having experienced the Biafra War in 1960s, the sufferings of his people in the course of the war, being a part of the Nigerian political leadership at some point, and a prominent and well-respected leader across Nigeria and Africa, would definitely not urge Nnamdi Kanu to further the agitation for a separate state of Biafra considering the consequences involved in doing this. In view of these, and as one journalist, Collins Freeman, once wrote, 'finding Biafra on a map is impossible these days. It existed for just two and a half years, from 1967-1970' (Freeman, Telegraph, January 21, 2017), Biafra might forever be lost on the world map.

IPOB had also been either denounced, criticized, and rejected by a number of those whose behalf it claimed to be agitating (Punch, February 2, 2017; Daily Post, November 10, 2016). As pointed out above, the majority of Biafrans who denounced IPOB did so for either of these three reasons: firstly, the agitation for an independent state of Biafra was considered as misplaced, hence, it needed to be dumped. Secondly, the agitation was not considered as beneficial to the Igbo people because leaving Nigeria would mean losing all that they had toiled to build behind and a Biafra state also had the tendencies of generating ethnic animosity and conflicts amongst the Igbo. Lastly, IPOB's agitation did not reflect the overall interests of the Igbo ethnic group, hence, it could be better considered as a struggle for self-popularity or political relevance rather than being propelled by the love and affection for the Igbo speaking people home and abroad.

3. Mending the Holes: IpoB, Biafrans and Nigerian Government

The position of IPOB had been made clear from the inception of this agitation: it is secession or nothing else. The IPOB, with this slogan, must have hoped to attract a high number of Biafrans in and outside Nigeria, especially by laying claims on the aspects of Igbo 'marginalization and insecurity' in Nigeria. This agitation, however, did not appeal to many Biafrans as they considered it as pointless and urged IPOB and its supporters to devise other means of defending the interests of the generality of Biafrans other than secession. This, as pointed out, did not go down with the IPOB members and as result, they launched attacks on their kinsmen who had, without mincing words, criticized and denounced them and even dissociated themselves from the ongoing struggle for independent state of Biafra by the organization. This, at some point, began to look like an intra-ethnic battle or struggle as none of the two opposing sides was willing to back down.

The IPOB, Biafrans and Nigerian government have huge roles to play in reaching a point of convergence for the purpose of promoting peace and security in the country. The IPOB needs to be realistic in its goals. It needs to create an avenue large enough for those Biafrans who had opposed its mandate to see that the southeast is indeed ripe enough to become an independent nation. This must be evident in the region's ability to deliver the equal level (even higher) of opportunities that Nigeria currently offers the Biafra especially economic and political. The southeast should also ensure that the issue of ethnic discrimination currently existing amongst them as pointed out Okonkwo in the above statement, gets addressed and such labels as ethnic superiority and inferiority get avoided for the benefit of all Igbo speaking peoples. With these in place, those who had criticized or are currently criticizing the IPOB, may likely change their minds and launch their support for the separatist group.

There might be the need for the Biafrans who had opposed the IPOB to remain diplomatic and constructive in their criticisms and critiques of the organization irrespective of the utterances or activities of the leaders of the separatist organization. In so doing, the separatist organization, IPOB, might begin to view issues from their perspective, hence, the change in its strategy towards embracing more subtle, popular, and peaceful approaches rather than the current approaches which had been decried as having the potentials of plunging Nigeria into another tunnel of ethnic conflict or violence.

The Nigerian government cannot be exonerated from this as well. The government needs to pay more and urgent attention to the clamour, complaints and demands of the citizens, irrespective of their tribes or ethnic, or even class. Provided their identities as Nigerians are verifiable to be true, the government owes them the responsibilities of paying attention and taking actions on areas where change is desired. The separatist group did not just wake up on a morning to start agitating for breakaway from Nigeria; this agitation resulted from a culmination of issues raised by the Igbo or Biafrans but unattended or resolved by the successive governments especially in the aspect of political power sharing and the need to beef up internal security. Hence, should the government pay attention to these areas by developing policies that are appealing enough to help the conditions and situations of members of each of the ethnic groups living within the country, there would definitely be minimal level of agitations aimed at secession as opposed to what we are currently experiencing with the IPOB.

History, as it is, does not only anchor the past, but also illuminates the present and shines light into the future of the present. Nigeria, IPOB, and Biafrans need to be willing to learn from their past experiences especially the events of 1960s. Nigeria, with its current

situation of insecurity, religious crises, insurgency, kidnapping and abductions, militancy, rife corruption, and series of political murders may be having too much to grapple with if IPOB launches a new war which would further compound the state of insecurity existent in the country. As a result, the Nigeria government, the IPOB, and Biafrans must stay dedicated to exploring other channels that devoid conflict or confrontation to resolving this issue. And the one path to this is diplomacy.

4. Conclusion

The Biafrans emerged in their struggle for the actualization of an independent Republic of Biafra in the 1960s as one focused, dedicated, determined, loyal and united people, especially during the early stages of the conflict. This trend, however, began to change due to the rising levels of sufferings, deaths and casualties amongst innocent and helpless Biafrans, especially children and women. A condition that was birthed by the federal blockades of foods and other needed supplies within Biafra at the time. As a result, and arguably, for humanitarian and ethnic concerns, some prominent members of the Biafra including Nnamdi Azikiwe, president of Nigeria (1963-1966), neglected the Biafra struggle and defected toward to side of the federal government. Also, key to this decision to defect was the fact that the possibilities of Biafra becoming victorious in the war was nowhere sighted by those prominent defectors. But aside these defectors, whose number did not amount to more than 0.5 percent of the entire Biafrans engaged in the war against Nigeria, the rest, both the weak and weary, fought until their last drops in January 1970. This was what the Biafrans stood for or represented at the inception of this independent struggle.

This had, however, changed in the recent times, mostly with the resurface and resurgence of organizations claiming to be representing the interests and defending the voices of the entire Igbo ethnic group existing within and beyond the boundaries of Nigeria. Prominent amongst such organizations remain the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), with the IPOB currently making the headlines as the main activist organization at the forefront of independent struggle or project. Despite the fact that its main emphasis had been focused on defending the rights and interests of the generality of Biafrans, a large number of Biafrans, whom it claimed to be defending, did not consider IPOB as a credible organization prepared enough to achieve its mandate. This had, on several occasions, led to unfriendly and bitter exchanges between IPOB members and its Biafran opponents, with IPOB not willing to shift or abdicate its position. Prominent among the fears of the critics of IPOB was that the activities of organization, rather than liberating the Biafrans from their present conditions, had high tendencies of worsening them in all standards and ramifications. Hence, opting for secession had no possibility of advancing their cause as one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. As alternatives, dialogues and other national rebirth strategies including restructuring were offered by the critics to be explored by the IPOB for the avoidance of the presence of the Nigerian Armed Forces on the Biafran soil again as they did on July 6, 1967 which marked the commencement of the first Biafra War.

5. References

- i. Adebola, A. S, 'The Kikuyu Independent School Movement and the 'Mau Mau' Uprising', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10, 1(1981), pp. 53-71.
- ii. BBC News, 'Nigeria Chibok Girls: Eighty-Two Freed By Boko Haram', May 7, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39833309>.
- iii. CNN News, '82 Chibok School Girls Released in Nigeria', May 7, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/06/africa/chibok-girls-released/>.
- iv. Daily Post, 'IPOB vow to Banish Joe Igbokwe from Igboland Over Anti-Biafra Comments', April 27, 2017. Accessed at <http://dailypost.ng/2017/04/27/ipob-vows-banish-joe-igbokwe-igbo-land-anti-biafra-comments/>
- v. Daily Post, 'I'm Not in Support of Biafra, I believe in One Nigeria', November 10, 2016. Accessed at <http://dailypost.ng/2016/11/10/im-not-support-biafra-believe-one-nigeria-actor-kenneth-okonkwo/>.
- vi. Daily Post, 'We'll Convince Nnamdi Kanu to Dump Secession Plan', April 30, 2017. Accessed at <http://dailypost.ng/2017/04/30/biafra-well-convince-nnamdi-kanu-dump-secession-plans-ohanaeze/>.
- vii. Daily Post, 'Biafra: I Will Obey Former Vice President, Ekwueme- Nnamdi Kanu', Ma 10, 2017. Accessed at <http://dailypost.ng/2017/05/10/biafra-will-obey-former-vice-president-ekwueme-nnamdi-kanu/>.
- viii. Falola, Toyin, and Ogechukwu Ezekwem (eds), *Writing The Nigeria-Biafra War* (Boydell and Brewer Ltd, 2016).
- ix. Freeman, Collins, 'The Man Fighting for the Independence of West African Nation of Biafra...from a Flat in Peckham', *The Telegraph*, January 21, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/21/man-fighting-independence-tiny-west-african-nation-biafra-council/>.
- x. IPOB, 'Willie Obiano Vowed to Wipe-out IPOB From Anambra State', May30.org, April 7, 2016. Accessed at <http://www.may30.org/biafra-willie-obiano-vowed-to-wipe-out-ipob-from-anambra-state/>.
- xi. Jeyifo, Biodun, 'First, There Was A Country; Then There Wasn't: Reflections on Achebe's New Book', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, 6(2013), pp. 683-697.
- xii. Mustapha, Abdul, R. 'Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria', *Democracy, Governance and Human Rights Programme Paper*, Number 24, UNRISD, November 2006, PP. 1-64.
- xiii. Okonkwo, Churchill, 'Opinion: Nigeria is Broken, But Biafra is not an Answer', *Naij.com*, May 2017. Accessed at <https://www.naij.com/1101910-opinion-nigeria-broken-biafra-answer.html>.
- xiv. Okonkwo, Omono, and Idris Ibrahim, 'Nigeria Deploys Experts to Tackle Tomato Scarcity', *Premium Times*, May 24, 2016. Accessed at <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/204013-nigeria-deploys-experts-tackle-massive-tomato-scarcity.html>.

- xv. Oputa, Charles, 'My Stand on Nnamdi Kanu and Biafra', Sahara Reporters, April 20, 2017. Accessed at <http://saharareporters.com/2017/04/20/my-stand-nnamdi-kanu-and-biafra-charly-boy>.
- xvi. Osborne, Myles, 'The Rooting out of Mau Mau From the Minds of Kikuyu is a Formidable Task': Propaganda and the Mau Mau War', *Journal of African History*, 56 (2015), 77-97.
- xvii. Premium Times, 'Nigerian Government Announces Agreements with Niger Delta Militants', May 29, 2016. Accessed at <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/204261-nigerian-government-announces-agreement-niger-delta-militants.html>.
- xviii. Premium Times, 'Key National Conference Recommendations you Need to Know', August 21, 2014. Accessed at <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/key-national-conference-recommendations-need-know/>.
- xix. RadioBiafra, 'Ohanaeze Ndigbo Should Understand that Nnamdi Kanu is not and will Never Agitate for Nigeria's Restructuring', May 2, 2017. Accessed at <http://radiobiafra.co/index.php/news/national-news/item/198231-biafra-ohanaeze-ndigbo-should-understand-that-nnamdi-kanu-is-not-and-will-never-agitate-for-nigeria-restructuring>.
- xx. Reuters, 'Nigeria Exchanges 82 Chibok Girls Kidnapped b Boko Haram for Prisoners', May 8, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security-idUSKBN1820P1>.
- xxi. Sahara Reporters, 'Please Stop Embarrassing the Igbo', May 9, 2017. Accessed <http://saharareporters.com/2017/05/09/please-stop-embarrassing-igbo-joe-igbokwe>
- xxii. The Guardian, 'Tomato Ebola Hits Nigeria as Moth Destroys Country's Staple Food', May 24, 2016. Accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/24/tomato-ebola-nigeria-moths-staple-food-crops>
- xxiii. The Guardian, 'Northern Elders vow to Defend Buhari Presidency', May 12, 2017. Accessed at <https://guardian.ng/politics/northern-elders-vow-to-defend-buhari-presidency/>.
- xxiv. The Punch, 'IPOB Attacks Mbaka for Saying 'elites' Should Lead Biafra Agitation', February 2, 2017. Accessed at <http://punchng.com/ipob-attacks-mbaka-saying-elites-lead-biafra-agitation/>.
- xxv. The Punch, 'I Won't Give up on Biafra Agitation, Say Nnamdi Kanu', May 9, 2017. Accessed at <http://punchng.com/i-wont-give-up-on-biafran-agitation-says-nnamdi-kanu/>
- xxvi. Uche, Chibuike, 'Oil, British Interests, and the Nigerian Civil War', *The Journal of African History* 49, 1(2008), pp. 111-135.
- xxvii. Vanguard, 'I Thank God Nnamdi Kanu is Free, say Ekwueme', May 10, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/05/thank-god-nnamdi-kanu-free-says-ekwueme/>.
- xxviii. Vanguard, 'CONFAB 2014 Report is the Wayforward for Nigeria', August 1, 2014. Accessed at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/08/confab-2014-report-way-forward-nigeria/>.
- xxix. Vanguard, 'CONFAB Recommends 54 States for Nigeria', August 25, 2014. Accessed at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/08/confab-recommends-54-states-nigeria/>.
- xxx. Vanguard, 'Instead of Biafra Agitation, Go Back Home and Develop South-East', January 20, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/01/instead-biafra-agitation-go-back-home-develop-south-east-charly-boy-tells-ndigbo/>.
- xxxi. Vanguard, 'Ohanaeze Ndigbo to Capture Data of All Igbo', March 22, 2017. Accessed at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/03/ohanaeze-ndigbo-capture-data-igbo/>.
- xxxii. World Health Organization (WHO), 'Latest Ebola Outbreak Over in Liberia; West Africa is at Zero, but now Flare-ups are Likely to Occur', January 14, 2016. Accessed at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2016/ebola-zero-liberia/en/>.
- xxxiii. Yanagizawa-Drott, D, 'Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence From the Rwandan Genocide', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2014), pp. 1-46.
- xxxiv. Zimmer, Carl, 'Ebola Evolved into Deadlier Enemy During the African Epidemic', *New York Times*, November 3, 2016.