

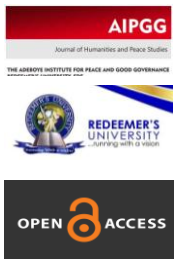
Ethnic nationalism: the case of the indigenous people of Biafra and the quest for the Igbo nation-state in Southeastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The political and strategic policies with which ethno-nationalist conflicts in Southeast Nigeria have habitually been addressed are adequate. The focus of this paper is on the political and ethno-strategic concepts that gird this mindset. This paper employs both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Data collected were analysed using narrative, descriptive and statistical styles. This paper in explaining this research relies on the theory of nationalism as propounded by Ernest Gellner, of the classical modernist school of thought. Theories of nationalism as propounded by this school of thought are important in this inquiry because they have helped to provide a better understanding of the evolution, organization and developmental progress of the concept nation, ethnic nationalism and the birth of modern nation-states. Thus, this paper is meant to remap and reprogram the parameters and strategies within which these conflicts can be addressed. The purpose of this paper is to examine and assess the directional undercurrents of sub-nationalist conflicts in Nigeria. The paper argues in its findings that the current state of instability in the country denies Nigeria the capacity to sustain the solution to manage these conflicts. Therefore, as a democratic state, Nigeria must muster the political will to build durable peace within our society. In conclusion this paper argues that a negotiation process has to be initiated and a peace process designed by the federal government inviting key stakeholders and parties to the conflict in the Southeast for dialogue on the Biafra dispute.

Key words: Ethno-nationalism, conflict, democracy

Introduction

The resurgence of separatist movements and agitations in most modern states together with the contemporary experience and the response by the various central governments have raised serious questions with regards to the nature and degree of contribution of ethnic sub-nationalism to the formation of modern societies. In Spain the most prominent sub-nationalist movement is the crusade for Catalanian independence, in Iraq the Kurds are trying to break away from the republic, in Nigeria's Southeastern region a movement that calls itself the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra is pushing for the secession of the Southeast region to form a sovereign state of Biafra. Recently in Italy two wealthy states are pushing for a vote for autonomy from the national government. In all these, the question that arises is; why do societies or communities in developed countries which enjoy full civil liberties, human rights and advanced political economy still sojourn on the quest to push for political divorce from national unions? In this regard, Huszka (2014) asserts that national or ethnic groups rise and demand secession or self-determination for a variety of reasons, which include the incompatible nature of governance at the center, resentment of economic marginalization, the perception of a threat to the minority group, fear of cultural extinction, infringements on civil liberties, and a string of broken promises, such as the withdrawal of autonomy¹. In the same vein, these demands are in fact the main promises of a modern state to its citizens namely; political participation, equal treatment before the law and protection from the arbitrariness of state power, dignity for the weak and poor, and social justice and security². Thus, ethnic nationalists or separatists' movements can be said to grow within a multi-ethnic state when there exists some form of group insecurity and also when a specific or dominant ethnic group determines access to the rights and services which the modern state is supposed to guarantee towards the excluded or marginalized groups.

In this vein, sustainable peace for a state, doesn't end at going through the motions or process of holding political campaigns, elections and electing or selecting political leaders, because many democratic countries are still highly centralized; many still violate human rights and forbid political opposition and freedom of speech and association as much as they oppress and suppress the press³. Hence, durable peace in its true sense has to reflect de-centralization of powers, equality, justice, fairness and a shift from conflict prone totalitarianism and ethnicity. This paper argues that democratic Nigeria has to incorporate the

¹Huszka, B. 2014. Secessionist movements and Ethnic conflict: debate-framing and rhetoric in independence campaigns. New York: Routledge.

²Wimmer A. 2004. Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity. United Kingdom: Cambridge University press.

³Danjibo N. 2012. 'Democracy and the Minority question in Nigeria: evaluating crisis events, 1999 – 2007' in I.O. Albert ed. *A history of social conflict and conflict management in Nigeria: a festschrift for Professor Biodun Adediran*. Ibadan: John Archers.

main tenets of a modern democratic state in order to resolve issues of ethno-nationalist tensions.

Hence, allegations of marginalization by groups within the Southeast and other parts of Nigeria may not necessarily be economic in nature but, may also be perpetrated in other sectors of national life including in the armed forces, national politics, the civil service. One allegation brought against the Nigerian state by sub-nationalist groups in the southeast has to do with the armed forces. Such that out of Nigeria's ancient three language-family (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) units the Igbo dominated southeast produced its first Chief of Army 50 years after the Nigerian Civil War in the person of Gen. O.A. Ihejirika. Thus, these ethnic nationalist groups argue that the Southeast has been on the receiving end of the politics and programs of the government of Nigeria. Citing from the late Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe who played a key role in Nigeria's independence down to the ordinary Igbo who are driving the economy of the country, but suddenly the current security architecture of the whole country, critically looked at, the Southeast has zero representation. Also, in the current democratic dispensation 1999 – 2023 the southeast has not been given the political opportunity to produce a Nigerian president with the stigma of the 1967-70 Biafran Civil War hovering around Southeast politicians. Therefore, casting doubts on genuine reconciliation and reintegration of the Southeast into the national political grid.

In trying to theorize about the conditions under which nationalism as a movement originates, Gellner (1983) highlights the fundamental role of ethnicity in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria as he argues that a particular form of violation of the ethnic nationalists political perception occurs, in the sense that any condition whereby the rulers of the political unit belong to a ethnic group other than that of the pro-self-rule group, this, (for ethnic nationalists) constitutes quite an outstanding intolerable breach of political propriety⁴. Nigeria as a multi-national state has experienced a plethora of ethno-nationalist agitations over issues such as religion, resource control, perceived marginalization, equity and regional elections from independence till date. This is because in the Nigerian system the problem of political nepotism – the politics of favoritism shown to relatives – is firmly rooted.

Political nepotism has been stretched to include not only family members but the ethnic group or clan who seek reward from their 'sons' and 'daughters' who find themselves in power at one level of government or the other. Hence, ethno-nationalist agitations in Nigeria have been ethnic based and narrow in nature, albeit genuine but, at the expense or detriment of other ethnic groups. The Southeastern separatist movement, IPOB, has developed the same ethnic nationalist principles as Gellner, as he argues in this regard thus, resulting in a narrow-minded approach to the problem of marginalization in the region. This

⁴Gellner, E. 1983. Nations and Nationalism: new perspectives on the past. New York: Cornell University press.

position has been hardened by perceived grievances experienced by the Igbo at the hands of the Nigerian state before, during and after the Civil War thus, leaving the idea of filling the pinnacle position in government from Igbo extraction a pipedream⁵. Although prominent sons and daughters of the Igbo dominated Southeast region have occupied strategic positions at the federal level in various governments, particularly during democratic regimes, people such as Alex Ekwueme (Vice-President of Nigeria, 1979-1982); Senator Evans Enwerem (Senate President of Nigeria, 03 June 1999 – 18 November 1999); Dr. Chuba Okadigbo (Senate President of Nigeria, 1999 – 2000); Senator Adolphus Wabara (Senate President of Nigeria, 03 June 2003 – 05 April 2005); Prof. Chukwuma Soludo (Governor Central Bank of Nigeria 2004-2009); Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister for the Economy, 2011-2015) yet it seems occupying the highest political office in the land remains the key to Southeast sociopolitical reintegration to Nigerian political society since the end of the Civil War. Consequently, some scholars in analyzing ethnicity not only examine the interaction between class and ethnicity but they also relate this interaction to scarce resources in this case political power.

Otite (2000) emphasizes one vital issue that in dealing with both ethnicity and class in Nigeria we are concerned with non-productive units, thus suggesting that both (ethnicity and class) are irrelevant in one Marxist sense of the relation of production⁶. Nnoli (1978: 176-177) clarified this point on the part of class resting on the instrumentality of ethnicity by arguing that historically, these classes (i.e. traditional aristocracy, petty bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie) have never been oriented toward the productive aspects of social life. They emphasize the distributive dimension. Unable to increase production, they depend on the manipulation of distribution for the benefits which they derive from society⁷. In Nigeria, one of the instruments for this manipulation has been ethnicity. This puts to question what the ethnic nationalists in southeastern Nigeria actually want and also queries if their agitation is genuine or not.

Conceptual discourse

Nation

The concept 'nation' can be a bit tricky to define, especially when compared with other terms like 'tribe' or 'ethnic group' which have the same attributes. Hobsbawm (1992) as cited in Gottlieb (1993: xi), argues that the chief characteristic of this way of classifying groups of human beings is that it is in some ways primary and fundamental for the social existence, or even the

⁵Siollun, M. 2009. *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's military coup culture 1966-1976*. New York: Algora Publishing.

⁶Otite, Onigun. 2000. *Ethnic Pluralism, Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Limited.

⁷Nnoli, Okwudibia. 1978. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension

individual identification of its members. No satisfactory criterion can be discovered for deciding which of the many human collectives should be labeled this way⁸. Culture, ethnicity, religion, education, geographical location, a single privileged vernacular are features that define human collectives such as, cultural group and ethnic group. Though they are not classified as nations, yet all these attributes are incorporated in the character of a nation. Consequently, Gellner (1983: 6) defined nation using two makeshift definitions to help pinpoint this elusive concept. Gellner (1983: 7) argued firstly that, two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and way of behaving and communicating. Secondly (ibid 1983: 7), two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artifacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. Gellner (1983) further argued that a mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) become a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non – members. Ernest Gellner happens to be the doyen of the academic study of nationalism hence this paper cites him extensively.

Importantly, Bradshaw (2008: 16) further asserts that nations being a product of modernity are only recognized by modernists. Human collectives when confronted by a foreign oppressor would only see an oppressor and would not notice or mind the foreignness. Bradshaw (2008) decisively argues that, a nation is a human collective, distinct from a cultural or ethnic group because when threatened by a foreign oppressor; it sees an oppressor, notices its foreignness and fights, resists or opposes the foreign oppressor⁹. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper a nation would be contextualized as that human collective which shares a common culture, ethnicity, religion, education, geographical location, a single privileged vernacular, whose members firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership and when confronted or threatened by foreign oppression would fight or resist such. Nations have an element of core-territoriality, which implies an identification with a particular spatial location within a State, such as the Yoruba of the South-western parts of Nigeria, the Ijaw of the South-south and the Kanuri of the North-eastern part of Nigeria. The core-territorial aspect implies that not all the members of a nation or ethnic group live within the core-territory, indeed, most adventurous and educated members live outside of it, in the urban and other parts of the State. Yet during moments of crises such as the

⁸Gottlieb, G. 1993. Nation against State: A new approach to ethnic conflicts and the decline of sovereignty. New York: Council of Foreign Relations press.

⁹Bradshaw, C. 2008. Bloody Nations: moral dilemmas for nations, states and international relations. England: Ashgate.

1967-70 civil war and the June 12, 1993 crisis, members of a nation return to their home territories where their safety is perceived to be best guaranteed (Otitte 2000). Hence, the concept nation is a modern construct with a unified culture. As a result, Nigeria is a multinational state - a cluster of nations and ethnic groups – and not a nation itself. Today those human clusters that are nations still resist the way they are governed as evident in the various ethno-nationalist agitations across the Nigerian state from independence till date.

Moreover, Lemarchand (1968)¹⁰ and Horowitz (1971)¹¹ reinforce the above argument as they posit, that the quest for separatism or secession by nations tends to heighten among deeply divided multi-national societies, where facts of difference, disadvantage or prevailing negative social conditions provides the impetus for both the imagination and subsequent action in respect of such goal. Indeed, a nation within a multi-national society with adversarial ethnics is more likely to behave in this fashion, in seeking separateness from what it perceives to be a hostile commonwealth. This speaks to the goal of exclusion which in part, accounts for the claim that when ethnic conflicts occur, horizontal groups usually aim....at the exclusion of other parallel groups (Lemarchand 1968: 16 – 49; Horowitz 1971: 235). This exclusion maybe political, economic, or social in nature but, in whatever coloration it occurs it polarizes the society and can lead to violent conflict or outright civil war in which mobilization would accordingly ensue along ethnic or identity lines. Therefore, Ihunna (2002)¹² agrees that the Nigerian Civil War can be validated on the above account given that this holds true for both the Igbo nation and the Nigerian Federation. Civil Wars or wars of secession are fought along ethnic lines and like the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), they have a tendency to be deadly and destructive in nature and affect society adversely in such a way that the country's population is thorn at the seams bottom to top. Such deeply divided societies in the world today as Stewart (2008) highlights include the Catholic/Protestant troubles in Northern Ireland and a number of Middle Eastern conflicts (between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, Sunnis and Shias in Iraq/Iran and Jews and Muslims in Palestine/Israel), as well as the recurrent ethnic conflicts in Burundi, DR Congo and Central African Republic¹³.

¹⁰Lemarchand, R. 1968 'Revolutionary phenomena in stratified societies: Rwanda and Zanzibar', *Civilisations* 18, 1: 16–51.

¹¹Horowitz, Donald. 1971. 'Three dimensions of ethnic Politics'. *World Politics* 23, 2: 232-244.

¹²Ihunna O.I. 2008. 'The Post-civil war Igbo Integration question: between rhetoric and realism' in E.E. Osaghae and E. Onwudiwe eds. *The Nigerian civil war and its aftermath*. Ibadan: John Archers. 236-343.

¹³Stewart, F. 2008 'Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: an introduction and some hypotheses' in F. Stewart ed. *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*. New York: Palgrave.

Theoretical Analysis

Theory of Nationalism: Modernism

The academic study of nationalism may have taken off in the twentieth century, but nationalism itself, as an ideology and a social and political movement, began since at least the end of the eighteenth century (Ozkirimli 2010¹⁴; Andrain and Apter 1995¹⁵). Much ink has been spilled since then, first by philosophers, later by historians, in trying to understand nationalism as it soon became clear that nationalism in a multi-national society was neither something that could be easily brushed under the carpet nor a temporary stage in the historical evolution of human societies (Ozkirimli 2010). This paper in explaining this research will rely on the classical modernist school of thought of the theory of nationalism as propounded by Ernest Gellner (1925 -1995). Theories of nationalism as propounded by this school of thought are important in this inquiry because they have helped to provide a better understanding of the evolution, organization and developmental progress of the concept nation, ethnic nationalism and the birth of modern nation-states. In general, modernization theories investigate the origin of the modern state and the concept of nation.

Classical modernist theories emerged during the enlightenment era, which began in eighteenth century Europe. The Enlightenment changed the way peoples were governed and was a protest against the medieval Catholic synthesis. This era saw to the rise of enlightenment thinkers who sketched an interpretation of modernity based on secularization, individualism and active participation in politics to transform society (Andrain and Apter 1995:28; Anderson 2006¹⁶; Uduigawomen 2016¹⁷). During this period moral/spiritual/intellectual values became separated from material interests. Secularization prevailed, rather than promoting civic virtue and religious values, government functioned primarily to realize material interests: physical security, economic prosperity and concrete benefits to individuals (Bradshaw 2008; Andrain and Apter 1995). Thus, between rulers and the ruled, power, wealth and status began to take precedence over spiritual priorities. Political leaders concentrated on gaining and maintaining power. The individual was transformed from subject to citizen hence; in democratic countries citizens sought material happiness through public policies¹⁸.

¹⁴Ozkirimli, U. 2010. Theories of Nationalism; a critical introduction. England: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁵Andrain, C.F. and D. Apter. 1995. Political Protest and Social Change: analyzing politics. London: Macmillan.

¹⁶Anderson, B. 2006. Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso.

¹⁷Uduigawomen, A. 2016. et al; A critical History of Philosophy (modern philosophy). Calabar: Ultimate Index.

¹⁸Andrain and Apter 1995.

According to Smith (1998a: 3), modernism, the belief that nations and nationalism are intrinsic to the modern world and the revolution of modernity, achieved its canonical formulation in the modernization theories of the 1960s with scholarly works like Gellner's *Nature of Human Society Series* published in 1964, which achieved wide currency academically in the wake of the movements for decolonization in Asia and Africa¹⁹. Just as the enlightenment thinkers regarded reason as a technical means to master nature, these newly independent societies understood that reason gives the citizen or group or society the freedom to reject dogma, to think for themselves, to criticize unjust public policies and reform society. These are the principles or philosophies that drive and gave rise to the ethnic-nationalist movement in Southeast Nigeria because the groups seem to reject the situation around them and seek a transformation or a reformation of the society they live in. Unfortunately, these ideologies directly challenge the sovereignty of the Nigerian state. It is on record that elements within the Ijaw ethnic group of the South-south / Niger Delta region spearheaded a militant insurgency against the Nigerian state as the region agitated for financial autonomy or what was called resource control. A lot of instability resulted from the Niger Delta insurgency as lives and livelihoods were lost, properties destroyed, and crude oil drilling the back-bone of Nigeria's economy was hurt. A full-fledged amnesty program had to be carried out, civil war style, for some semblance of sanity to return to the Delta region. Also, in the north-eastern part of Nigeria an ethno-religious insurgency has ravaged Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, killing thousands of citizens, displacing millions of Nigerians and thereby destabilizing the region. Fed up with the inadequacies of the secular Nigerian State, Boko Haram insurgency began a bloodthirsty quest to establish an Islamic Caliphate, hence challenging dogma about Nigeria's indivisibility. Currently, there is an effective amnesty program for repentant Boko Haram members in an effort to reintegrate militia fighters into society. Therefore, it is not only the Igbo dominated southeast that has fought the Nigerian state in battle thereby challenging State sovereignty.

Ethno-nationalist ideology could manifest as economic, religious or ethnic tensions, however, nations on attainment of that nationalist consciousness begin to seek separateness from being sub in a whole or larger political component. Research on ethnic-nationalism has shown that in the name of nationalism the South Slavs sought their own state separate from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Irish sought separation from Britain, the Basques sought separation from Spain, the Acehnese and the Timorians have sought separation from Indonesia, and the Tamils have sought separation from Sri Lanka. All of these separatist movements were resisted by the megalomaniacal state and were followed by violent warfare consequently; the prevalence of these civil wars has certainly helped reinforce beliefs that nationalism or ethnic nationalism is indeed dangerous (Bradshaw 2008²⁰: 2-3; Laitin 2007²¹: 4-5;

¹⁹Smith, A. D. 2003. 'The poverty of Anti-nationalist Modernism', *Nations and Nationalism* 9, 3: 357-70.

²⁰Bradshaw 2008

²¹Laitin, D. D. 2007. *Nations, States and Violence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Iyall-Smith 2007: 13²²; Gottlieb 1993: 3-5²³; Huszka 2014²⁴). Accordingly, Rupesinghe (1998) opines that when violence is introduced in any relationship; be it parent/child, employer/employee, ruler/ruled; a vital element of that relationship has been destroyed²⁵. In this case violence erupted between the Nigerian state and one of its tripartite component ethnic groups in the form of the 1967 – 1970 Nigerian Civil War. A secessionist war which saw the federal government pitched against the separatist state of Biafra. Osaghae (2002) argues that the issue of secession by the Southeast was not baseless in any way as it was a method by a nation to insulate itself from the raging hostilities and animosities sanctioned by the government of a multi-national state²⁶.

In retrospect Andrain and Apter (1995: 29) were of the opinion that during the enlightenment, the political distance between the rulers and the ruled narrowed consequently, enlightenment thinkers who formulated assumptions about a social contract held that individuals no longer remained passive subjects but became active citizens who gained the right to protest against existing authority and even overthrow political regimes²⁷. Hence, with all this knowledge concerning the social contract out there in the open, Wallenstein and Axell (1995) as cited in Miall et al. (2003: 27) reported a new pattern of conflict in the 1990s in which the prime emphasis was on challenges to existing State authority, including such secessionist movements as found in Asia and Africa, which threaten the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the host State thus, resulting in fragmentation of such societies with no end to violence²⁸. This is typical of most armed conflicts in Africa and other parts of the globe which have separatist coloration and began years after the Second World War in the 1960's. Miall et al. (2003: 22-33) lists 44 such countries in what was termed a statistic of deadly quarrels as major armed conflicts.

One consequence of this is that globally, the fear of the devastation caused by unbridled separatist nationalism or ethnic sub-nationalism is real and dangerous.²⁹ Hence, this fear has sustained the Cold War mentality of suppression of ethnic nationalist movements or groups in Nigeria as experienced during the military clamp down on separatist movements tagged Operation Python Dance II carried out in September, 2017. Although from a security perspective such measures are effective and necessary in securing the

²²Iyall-Smith, K. 2007. *The State and Indigenous Movements*. New York: Routledge.

²³Gottlieb, G. 1993. *Nation against State: A new approach to ethnic conflicts and the decline of sovereignty*. New York: Council of Foreign Relations press.

²⁴Huszka 2014

²⁵Rupesinghe, K. 1998. *Civil wars, Civil peace: an introduction to conflict resolution*. London: Pluto press.

²⁶Osaghae, E. E. and E. Onwudiwe. 2002. 'General Introduction: the relevance of the Nigerian Civil War' in E.E.Osaghae and E. Onwudiwe, eds. *The Nigerian civil war and its aftermath*. Ibadan: John Archers, 3-7.

²⁷Andrain and Apter (1995)

²⁸Miall, H. 2003. et al. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: the prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity.

²⁹Laitain, D. D. (2007)

sovereignty of the state which is actually being challenged by actions of the pro-Biafra separatist groups, importantly, the rules of engagement for Operation Python Dance II ought to have considered the cost in civilian lives. Laitin (2007) maintains that the dangers to the world presented by the mass killings of ethnic 'others' in Rwanda, Sudan, and former Yugoslavia, demand that the world and indeed national governments better understand what ethnic nationalism and its cultural foundations are all about; when differences are most likely to become lethal, and how to manage cultural and ethno-national differences politically. The current separatist agitations in the Southeastern parts of Nigeria could be managed more strategically and transparently but as Bradshaw (2008:3) observes that nations and States seem to be conducting the dialogue of the deaf since nations claiming self-rule are embedded in States often unwilling to grant it.

Decline of previous Pro-Biafran groups and the emergence of indigenous people of Biafra (ipob)

In discussing the rise of the current pro-Biafra agitation in the Southeast one must also look at previous agitations such as that of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). MASSOB can be rightly described as a secessionist movement whose aim was to achieve the same goal as the Southeastern region pursued under then Col. Emeka Ojukwu by the declaration of the Sovereign State of Biafra in 1967. This declaration led to a civil war with the Nigerian federation which saw to the collapse of the secessionist Biafran republic in 1970. Decades later the quest for self-determination was rekindled by the formation of MASSOB which took place on 13th of September 1999 under the leadership of a young Indian-trained lawyer in Lagos, Mr Ralph Uwazurike. Following this, on 1st November, 1999, Uwazurike dispatched a document to the United Nations office in New York, with the title 'Biafra Bill of Rights.' In the Biafra Bill of Rights, it is stated that the people of Biafra, namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Delta States numbering about 40 million and being one of the major tribes in Nigeria and two of the geopolitical zones within the Federal Republic of Nigeria, hereby seek the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra. It is true that the popularity of MASSOB is very low among the Igbo elite and mainstream political leadership on account of its heavy reliance on those with little intellectual exposure.

The support is high among those with little or no experience of the 1967 Civil War, and those who experienced the horrors of the war are attracted to it on account of its philosophy of non-violence. Consequently, a field survey was carried out among tertiary and post-graduate degree holders in the five Southeastern states that make up the Southeast region of Nigeria. As a result, most respondents were civil servants or those engaged in the corporate private sector but, not traders or artisans. This was to acquire empirical data on issues pertaining to ethnic-sub nationalism in Southeastern Nigeria. The bio-data of the respondents in the study area were analyzed and presented in Table 1

below. As in all sub-national movements, factional and rival formations do spring up from time to time due to clash of ambitions, perceived weaknesses of the leadership and infiltration. The decline of the group began as a result of heavy government infiltration and clamp down on leadership and members of MASSOB.

**Table 1. Danjibo and Wokocha 2019³⁰: Bio-data of Respondents.
(n = 500)**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20 – 30 years	70	14.0
31 – 40 years	333	66.6
41 – 50 years	97	19.4
Mean = 35.54		
Sex		
Female	144	28.8
Male	356	71.2
Educational Qualification		
Primary	0	0
Secondary	0	0
Tertiary	329	65.8
Post graduate	171	34.2
Occupation		
Farming	0	0
Trading	0	0
Civil Servant	430	86.0
Other: Self/Unemployed	70	14.0
Marital Status		
Married	362	72.4
Single	138	27.6

From Table 1, it could be observed that majority (66.6%) of the respondents were within the age bracket of 31 – 40 years, followed by 19.4% whom were within 41 – 50 years old while 14% were within 20 – 30 years old. The mean age of the respondents in the area was calculated to be 35.54 years which suggests that majority of the respondents in the study area were still young and

³⁰Danjibo, N. and D.A. Wokocha. 2019. Survey of formal and informal sector in South East Nigeria unpublished field survey.

energetic to do production activities as they belong to the economically active population category which is between 25 – 59 years.

Sex wise, majority (71.2%) of the respondents were males while the rest constituting about 28.8% were found to be females. Furthermore, the study showed that majority (65.8%) of the respondents had attained tertiary education while the remaining 34.2% had attained post graduate degrees suggesting high level of literacy amongst the respondents. From the analysis, majority (86%) of the respondents were civil servants while others (14%) were either self-employed or unemployed. In terms of marital status, Majority (72.4%) of the respondents were married while 27.6% were still single.

It is this decline of MASSOB and its subsequent failure that gave birth to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is an association that fights for the political emancipation of the indigenous ethnic groups constituting what was Biafra during the Nigerian civil war and prior to the colonial era of that region of Nigeria. The organization founded in 2012, is led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, a United Kingdom-based political activist who had been detained by the Nigerian government since October 2015 despite court orders for his release but he was however granted bail on the 26th of April, 2017. The emergence of IPOB as a pro-self-government movement threatens two major elements of the sovereignty of the Nigerian state. First, IPOB threatens the right to exclusive control over territory which is a central ingredient of the sovereignty of states and; secondly, the Nigerian states' power to compel obedience of the populace to the sovereign will and the possession of physical force superior to any other that makes such compulsion possible.

Table 2: Ascertaining if IPOB Represents aspirations of the South-East(*n* =500)

Questions	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1. Do IPOB activities affect your life?	Yes (1)	97	19.4
	No (0)	403	80.6
2. Do you support IPOB?	Yes (1)	97	19.4
	No (0)	403	80.6
3. Are you a member?	Yes (1)	96	19.2
	No (0)	404	80.8
4. Do you agree with their method of operation?	Yes (1)	103	20.6
	No (0)	397	79.4
	Yes (1)	282	56.4
	No (0)	218	43.6
5. Do you believe in one Nigeria?	Yes (1)	218	43.6

	No (0)	282	56.4
6. Do you want a separate nation for Biafra?	Yes (1)	356	71.2
	No (0)	144	28.8
7. Is IPOB peaceful?	Yes (1)	356	71.2
	No (0)	144	28.8
8. Does IPOB represent the aspiration of the people of the Southeast?	Yes (1)	97	19.4
	No (0)	403	80.6
	Yes (1)	74	14.8
	No (0)	426	85.2
9. Do you agree with IPOB's ideology?			
10. Do you agree with the way the Federal Government is handling the issue of IPOB?			

Danjibo and Wokocha 2019

The Headquarters of IPOB is in Isi Ama Afara Ukwu, in Umuahia, the home of its leader. There it has the Presidential Lodge. IPOB has a closely knit hierarchical grass roots oriented organizational structure parallel to a shadow government and the source of all sit-at-home orders issued within the Southeast in a bid to challenge the federal government. From Table 2, it could be observed that within Umuahia and other parts of the Southeast, majority (80.6%) of the respondents rejected the fact that IPOB activities affect their lives while paltry 19.4% accepted that IPOB activities affect their lives (one of the reasons being because of their sit-at-home orders). Also, it may well be observed that majority (80.8%) of the respondents are not members of IPOB while 19.2% turned out to be members of IPOB. The structure of IPOB organization is such that at the apex leadership comprises of a Directorate of states made up of 10 to 12 members who oversee the day to day running of the organisation across the Southeast. The next level of leadership are the supervisors in charge of provinces in which states contained by the Southeast region are divided into provinces as such there can be as many as 30 provinces in a state. The supervisors control the coordinators and as such each street in a city, town or village has a coordinator. Members are organized by their coordinators.

The Nigerian government maintains that the organization is illegal and pursues an unlawful secessionist aim that threatens the territorial integrity of Nigeria. Stewart (2008) argues that within an ethnic group large scale group

mobilization is unlikely to occur in the absence of serious grievances at both leadership and mass level. Hence, the role of leaders is important in political mobilization, in choosing the grounds for mobilization (whether, religion, class or ethnicity) and in 'selling' the importance of the chosen identity to the people being mobilized. At the leadership level, the main motivation may be political ambition and hence such mobilization is particularly likely to occur where there is political exclusion of the agitating ethnic group's leaders; while the mass members of the ethnic group may also be concerned with the political representation of their ethnic group as a whole, their primary motivation is more likely to be grievance concerning the economic and social position of their group relative to other ethnic groups³¹.

One possible source of fuel for the growth of this ethno nationalist group could be the partial re-integration of the Igbo ethnic group into the national political network since after the Nigerian Civil War. With no formal post conflict peacebuilding process after the Civil War, the Southeast region has continued to struggle for political survival and relevance within the Nigerian state. This situation has created opportunity for mass protests and nationalist movements in revolt to inequalities, thus the state responds with a counterproductive policy of violent repression of protesters in which lives are lost and as such, these losses of lives erase the legitimacy of the federal government within this region in the eyes of the protesters and their supporters. Interestingly it could be observed that majority (56.4%) of respondents do not want a separate state for Biafra and agree to remain in Nigeria while 43.6% want a separate country for Biafra (see Table 2). This is a close margin and may be attributed to poor performance of the Nigerian political system 1999 -2017 as stated above.

Some Grievances of the Ethnic Nationalists in Southeastern Nigeria

- 1). The South East does not have the same number of states and local governments as the other zones
- 2). The Onitsha seaport, a key economic infrastructure in the region commissioned by late President Shehu Shagari in 1982, has not being used.
- 3). The Second Niger Bridge has remained on the drawing board for decades but work began only in 2019 and was completed in 2022 despite this there are complaints about the low nature of the bridge which would prevent ships docking at the Onitsha seaport constructed and commission in 1982 by the then Shagari regime.
- 4). The issues of trust deficits within the polity called Nigeria as it concerns people from south-eastern Nigeria which has led to the displacement of Igbo in the appointments into strategic federal government positions.
- 5). The issue of an Igbo presidency.

³¹Stewart 2008

From a historic perspective, conflicts of self-determination, secession and sovereignty are relatively new on the international political land scape and arose when citizens began to question unjust government policies as citizens initiated the demand for more responsibility from their home governments and also question the way which these governments were run. The rise of IPOB and the subsequent agitation for separatist Biafra challenges the structure of governance in Nigeria and shows that a group of Nigerians will no longer remain passive observers in the face of what they term a hostile and antagonistic political arrangement. Consequently, analysis from Table 2 show that majority (56.4%) of the respondents believe in one country Nigeria while, 43.6% do not believe in a united Nigerian state. The rise of IPOB indicates that certain citizens, individuals and groups who have come together to form and support this movement are no longer comfortable with the Nigerian political system which they see as a hindrance or limitation to achieving their full potential in life. Although, from the field survey conducted this percentage is quite small with 80.6% of the respondents disagreeing with IPOB's ideology while a minor 19.4% agree with the separatist's organisations ideology (see Table 2).

Since modern states and governments should function primarily to realize material interests such as physical security, economic prosperity and concrete benefits to citizens, the rise of groups like IPOB and others across the country signify a failure of sorts on the part of the Nigerian political system 1999 -2017, in the provision of these much sought after public goods. Ho-Won Jeong (2000) argues that the denial of elements required for human development is inherent to many oppressive societies and conflict often derives from such malfunctioning social systems³². Rotberg (2004) sums this up by maintaining that the modern state fails in its responsibilities when it is consumed by internal violence and ceases to deliver positive political goods to its inhabitants³³. The governments lose credibility, and the continuing nature of the particular state itself becomes questionable and illegitimate in the hearts and minds of its citizens. Thus, was observed that majority (71.2%) of the respondents accepted the fact that IPOB represents the aspiration of the people of the Southeast while 28.8% rejected the fact that IPOB represents the aspiration of the people. From its action, IPOB seems to have chosen the path of secession and self-determination as a way out of what it sees as the unfavorable and malfunctioning Nigerian political alliance.

However, IPOB alleges to peacefully agitate for the sovereignty of Biafra as a separate republic from Nigeria. It advocates separation along pre-colonial lines which will consist of indigenous peoples of the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria. It believes the lack of common values and culture between Biafra and the other parts of Nigeria makes it impossible to have a workable

³²Jeong, H-W. 2008. Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis. London: Sage.

³³Rotberg, R.I. 2004. When States Fail: causes and consequences. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press.

union despite the fact that in reality large numbers of Igbo are scattered across the length and breadth of Nigeria. It claims to have remained very peaceful in its effort at restoring Biafra. As is the case with many post-colonial states in Africa and other parts of the World, the Nigerian state has descended heavily on the separatist groups' members with little concern for its alleged peaceful stance. From Table 2, it could be observed that majority (71.2%) of the respondents accepted that IPOB is peaceful (reasons being that their movement has been through peaceful protest as they are not armed and do not attack) while 28.8% were of the opinion that IPOB is a violent organisation.

Other parts of the globe where the State responds to ethnic nationalism through repression include Spain; against its two regions the Basque and the Catalan separatists, Turkey; against the Kurds and in Russia; against the Chechnya separatist republic. Armed riot police and the military confront these members especially during IPOB rallies resulting in the killings of protesters usually with no government inquiry into such killings. The federal government should as a matter of transparency investigate these extra-judicial murders in an effort to legitimize its authority in the region, for the reason that IPOB tries to insist locally and internationally on its peaceful rallies and as a non-violent movement. Comparably, it was observed that majority (85.2%) of the respondents do not approve with the way the Federal Government's handling the issue of IPOB however, 14.8% agree with the Federal Government's conflict handling style.

It is important to note that since the emergence of the pro-Biafra nationalist movement the federal government has done little or nothing in trying to dialogue with its leadership despite the movements' alleged peaceful disposition. This stance may be to present a formidable resistance to any challenge to the sovereignty of the Nigerian state and also a statement that the sovereignty of Nigeria is non-negotiable. On the contrary, it is on record that the Nigerian government negotiated its way out of the Niger Delta insurgency by dialoging with the Ijaw nation and other nationalities within the South South region. It also on record that the Nigerian state is currently in negotiation talks with the Boko Haram sect, in an effort to suppress the religious insurgency that has ravaged the Northeast region; these are two groups which have demonstrated their ability to undermine and wrestle the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force and violence in the enforcement of order and security from the Nigerian state.

Hence, Gottlieb (1993) argues that the irrepressible movement of ideas, people and goods requires leaders to be politically flexible and economically sophisticated. In today's world, people will have a right to define themselves, thus constructs based on absolute sovereignty and on rigid borders cannot provide the vision for settling difficult problems of self-determination. Despite the Brexit issue, several examples can be cited with regards to powerful states relinquishing certain attributes of state sovereignty to supra-national institutions like the European Union and to other infra-national, regional authorities as more powerful states in Europe are redistributing aspects of their

sovereignty to non-governmental organizations for greater efficiency³⁴. Thus, the examples in Europe have shown that the issue of sovereignty can be re-negotiated in today's World. This they have done through conflict management techniques such as negotiations (treaties), mediation, arbitration and joint-problem solving (international / national conferencing). With mutual understanding and respect for each part of society these powerful European states have devalued the coinage of sovereignty in exchange for greater efficiency and delivery of political / public goods to their citizenry.

This means that notions of sovereignty are changing. The philosopher Thomas Hobbs, in building his arguments that resulted in the creation of the modern state constructed them on the covenant tradition of the Bible and on the logical reasoning associated with Geometry. Hobbs specified a contractual relationship uniting the rulers with the ruled. Through the calculating use of reason, individuals established a covenant and authorized the sovereign, either one man or an assembly, to act for them, to define the general interest, and to prescribe their rights and duties. Andrain and Apter (1995) argue that obedience to the sovereign rests on fear of disobedience, of which our educational system teaches individuals the duties of citizenship, respect for the rule of law, the need to restrain self-interests and the importance of showing awe before the sovereign. Justice denotes equal treatment by the sovereign, that is, political equality before the sovereign's laws. If the sovereign no longer guarantees citizens their survival, personal security and life necessities, then they have the right to withdraw their loyalty³⁵.

The conflict management style of the federal government has only resulted in a multiplicity of Igbo ethnic nationalist groups. The Daily Sun (14th August, 2016) reports a statement accredited to the Nigerian government, saying that it has vowed to use all resources at its disposal to crush any agitation for the division of Nigeria. The statement credited to the Federal government reflects the vicious methods of security operatives in confronting these IPOB protesters, including the just concluded and much criticized Operation Python Dance (Egwu Eke) II conducted by the Armed forces in the Southeast region. The position of the Federal government on Igbo ethnic nationalism has evidently resulted in the wide spread slaying of pro-Biafra agitators and the abuse of human rights as reported by Amnesty International³⁶. The Igbo nation has complained bitterly about the issue of marginalization and re-integration since the end of the civil war, through diverse media, including several constitutional conferences and the Justice Oputa Truth and Reconciliation panel, yet a workable conflict management strategy has not been applied³⁷. It could also be observed from the survey conducted that majority (71.2%) of the respondents accepted that IPOB represents the aspiration of the people of the Southeast

³⁴Gottlieb (1993)

³⁵Andrain and Apter(1995: 31)

³⁶Amnesty International. 2016. <<http://amnesty.org/Nigeria: killing of unarmed pro-Biafra supporters by military must be urgently investigated/2016>>. 08.09.2016.

³⁷Osaghae 2002

while 28.8% did not agree that IPOB represents the aspiration of the people of the Southeast.

Ipob and response of the Nigerian state

In order to prevent a violent escalation of the current ethnic nationalist crisis now and in the future, it is important to take a look at the response of the State to the emergence of IPOB and points of contact between the two parties. Stewart (2008) emphasizes that if governments fail to respond to demands from its citizens or chooses to repress such demands violently, political mobilization may become violent, with the power of identities binding people together thus, leading to an acceleration of political instability. Points of contact or the relationship between IPOB and the Nigerian state can be said to be one devoid of accommodation and the principles of joint problem-solving mechanisms. The response of the Nigerian state has been one of repression and can be perceived in two ways;

- a) First and foremost, the violence visited upon IPOB demonstrators and protesters by Nigerian security agencies
- b) Secondly, the incarceration of leaders of IPOB and the court dispute between them and the Nigerian state. Although at the time of writing this paper several IPOB members incarcerated in the Southeast had been released including 114 female members held in Owerri prisons.

Thus, William and Rhenisch (1977) argue that, if the use of punitive sanctions by authorities is intended to deter specific types of actions, what little evidence one can find, suggests that effectiveness is greatest when most offenses are promptly detected and punished by moderate sanctions, those sanctions regarded as proportionate to the seriousness of the offense. But an entirely different set of possibilities appears if one can examine situations in which authorities attempt to totally suppress dissent through the use of terror. Terror in this special sense is a complex condition.

When the state tolerates the use of terror, the population is allowed to learn of mysterious deaths, disappearances, and torture. It is made known that secret police and informers are at work, and that eavesdropping, spying, wiretapping, and the like are being carried out. Rumors are encouraged. Arrests, detentions, confiscations, beatings, killings, imprisonments occur without warning and without public explanation³⁸. In this regard the security forces are used in an effort to violently repress ethnic nationalism in Southeastern Nigeria as evidenced by Operation Python Dance II, III & IV; a military crackdown on IPOB leaders and supporters but disguised as a security-oriented effort to boost security and checkmate criminal elements within the region. The better option would have been to initiate a process to constructively engage these ethnic nationalists in dialogue, re-integration and negotiations. Effort has been made

³⁸Williams, R. M. and M. Rhenisch, Madelyn. 1977. Mutual Accommodation: ethnic conflict and cooperation. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

by the federal government to negotiate with the dreaded Islamist sect Boko Haram in the past, even with the Niger Delta militants after years of conflict and economic sabotage, yet till date there has been no indication that government intends to engage the Igbo ethnic nationalist movement in a discourse, despite their alleged peaceful methods of operation. The Amnesty International's 2016 report on killings of unarmed pro-Biafra supporters alleges that Nigerian security forces used terror tactics on Igbo youths. All this occurred ahead of May 2016 planned pro-Biafran commemoration events in Onitsha, Anambra state. In addition, the human rights watchdog points out that there must be an end to the pattern of increased militarization of crowd control operations as soldiers are frequently deployed to undertake routine policing functions. Also, International human rights standards require that law enforcement officials must, as far as possible, apply non-violent means. The intentional lethal use of firearms is only permissible when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Evidence gathered by Amnesty International in the report states that IPOB members had informed the Anambra State Police Commissioner of their plans for Biafra Remembrance Day and requested for security to be provided for the procession.³⁹ Amnesty International has been conducting research into violence and killings of IPOB members and supporters in Southeast Nigeria since January 2016 and below are some of the documented cases of alleged unlawful killings by the Nigerian security forces between August 2015 and May 2016;

- i). In August 2015, military personnel allegedly opened fire on peaceful supporters of IPOB calling for an independent Biafran state.
- ii). The killings and mass arrests of members and supporters of IPOB by a joint military and police operations continued in October, November and December 2015.
- iii). On 17 December 2015, military personnel allegedly killed five people when they opened fire on members of the IPOB who were demonstrating in Onitsha in a celebration of a court order for the release of their purported leader, Nnamdi Kanu.
- iv). In February 2016, the Nigerian military purportedly used excessive force to disperse a peaceful gathering in a school compound in Aba. At least nine people were killed and many more injured. IPOB members claim over 20 youths were killed.

Many scholars agree that conflict is a form of interaction and communication especially when parties to the conflict understand the importance of negotiations but, notably here there is a lack of compromise in the conflict between the State and this pro-Biafra group. It seems both parties are locked in a zero-sum conflict. Arguments from some quarters urge that since Nnamdi Kanu was living in England before his arrest in Lagos, if he were a terrorist, he would have been arrested in England by the authorities there. The fact that he lived there without constraints or restraints shows he was not considered a threat, either to Britain or to Nigeria. It is important to note that the Nigerian

³⁹ Amnesty International report 2016

government is yet to conduct an independent investigation into any of these incidents.

Organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have a duty to scrutinize cases of injustices, denial and violation of human rights like the trial of IPOB leader, Mr. Nnamdi Kanu. Amnesty International has published two reports on extrajudicial killings of pro-Biafra agitators; these reports are extensively cited in this paper. The human rights agency reports that Mr. Nnamdi Kanu's trial has witnessed some strange procedures adopted by the Federal government in the case before the Federal High Court in Abuja of which as far as the trial of IPOB members is concerned, the issues of justice, fair hearing and human rights do not apply. From the view of the sub-nationalist agitators this is contrary to democratic principles and the rule of law as they claim their rights are trampled upon by state security and judicial institutions. Unfortunately, strategies of repression have been the hallmarks of the Federal government's response to the rise of this phase of ethnic nationalism in Southeastern Nigeria. Despite the fact that IPOB not particularly known to carry arms openly like other secessionist groups such as the Boko Haram insurgents or the Niger Delta militants. This was the situation until the creation of Eastern Security Network (ESN), the armed security outfit of IPOB created by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu to checkmate the activities of the armed Fulani herdsmen. Unfortunately, certain sector commanders of ESN have been allegedly involved in all manner of atrocities especially after the arrest of their leader Nnamdi Kanu in Kenya and his subsequent trial in a Nigerian court.

Accordingly, the nature or the structure of the Nigerian state is of vital importance in determining the cause and process of conflict management of ethnic nationalism. Several aspects are of relevance:

- 1). The structure of the state and of power: The Nigerian political system is highly concentrated, lacking division of powers or geographic decentralization of power. In general, one might expect conflict to be more probable with highly centralized systems than in less decentralized systems (such as countries that practice true federalism, or where power is diffused across regions, or there is substantial decentralization), because in centralized systems more is at stake when determining who controls the state (Bakke and Wibbels 2006⁴⁰; Suberu 2001)⁴¹.
- 2). How accommodating the Nigerian state is: People may feel grievances and mobilize politically, but such mobilization need not take a violent form neither does the states response. Those with grievances may acquire power, or be accommodated, peacefully. In

⁴⁰Bakke, K. and E. Wibbels. 2006. 'Federalism and Intrastate Struggles: the role of diversity and disparity'. CRISE Workshop on Federalism, Decentralization and Conflict. Oxford: Department of International Development.

⁴¹Suberu, R. 2001. Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Nigeria those with grievances of partial re-integration are yet to acquire power. Violent mobilization is more likely where there is little accommodation. In general, one would expect a democratic system to be more accommodating, especially where the socio-politically deprived group is a major ethnic group. However, fragile democracies can be conflict provoking so there is no simple equation between democracy and conflict (Snyder 2000⁴²; Stewart and O'Sullivan 1999⁴³). Relevant to this is the nature of the democratic system used in Nigeria. A first-past-the-post, winner-takes-all or restricted power-sharing system is likely to be much more conflict-prone than one involving all-inclusive power-sharing, of a formal or informal nature. Hence, the current calls for political restructuring by political analysts are important.

Significantly, the federal government retains the right to absolute sovereignty in matters of self-determination or secession within its borders unless the conflict spreads and leads to a breach of international peace. At such a point the international community can intervene. Until then, the right to peaceful assembly and association, as well as the right of freedom of expression and other human rights, are protected by the Nigerian constitution. The Nigerian state is also empowered by the same constitution to protect its sovereignty from internal and external aggression at all costs.

The issues of sovereignty, secession and ethnic nationalism stirring up in the Southeast are pitting the basic needs of individual members of a nation against the power of the sovereign state. Therefore, for ethnic sub-nationalism in the Southeast there is a solid non-material need at stake not plainly enough written into democratic principle which states that a people not only have the right to invite and disinvite, the rulers to rule them, but also the right to be ruled by one's own kind (Gellner 1983; Galtung and Jacobsen 2000⁴⁴). This need of course must have to survive the formidable show of force by the federal government, whose interest rests in the protection of state sovereignty and its defence of international stability. As violent fragmentation of the Nigerian state may not be in the best interest of the international community because from experience newer nation-states vacillate unsteadily between weakness and failure, with some truly failing, and a few even disintegrating.

⁴²Snyder, J.L. 2000. *From Voting to Violence: democratization and nationalist conflict*. New York: Norton.

⁴³Stewart, F. and M. O'Sullivan. 1999. 'Democracy, Conflict and Development-three cases' in G. Ranis, S.-C. Hu and Y.-P. Chu, eds. *The Political Economy of Comparative Development into the 21st century, essays in memory of John C.H. Fei*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. 1999.

⁴⁴Galtung, J. and C.G. Jacobsen, 2000. *Searching for Peace; the road to transcend*. London: Pluto press.

Recommendation

Resolving Ethnic Nationalism in Southeast Nigeria

The respondents in the study area suggested ways on resolving Biafra in Nigeria and their responses were analyzed and presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Suggestions on Resolving Biafra in Nigeria(*n =500*)*Danjibo and Wokocha 2019*

	Suggestion	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Negotiation	329	65.8
2.	Avoid/Ignore	74	14.8
3.	Force	0	0
		97	19.4
4.	Create Biafra		

From Table 3, It could be observed that majority (65.8%) of the respondents suggested "Negotiation" as a way of resolving ethno-nationalist agitations in the Southeast, followed by 19.4% who suggested "Creating Biafra" as a way of resolving these agitations for secession in Nigeria while 14.8% suggested "Avoid/Ignore" as a way of resolving the issue of Biafra in Nigeria. However, Negotiation appears to be the major way of resolving the ethnic sub-nationalist conflicts in Southeastern Nigeria as suggested by the respondents (65.8%).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the right to self-determination is an important human right, but it should not be interpreted as an automatic right to secession, independence or recognition by the international community as a state, not even to a high level of autonomy within a state. The right to self-determination is the right of a people to determine their status within a state, and by implication in the world, including the option of independence and the option of status quo. But, regardless of the decision, a right to autonomy at low or high level is not a right to be uncivil, just as the right of state sovereignty is not a right to disregard the right to life of others. There is an overriding principle of responsibility for the state. The Nigerian state obviously shows either a lack of political will to constructively engage the ethnic sub-nationalist movement or a complete lack of ideas on how to manage conflicts of ethnic nationalist coloration.

Thus, the oppressive and exclusionary politics and policies of the federal government since the end of the civil war has led to the rise of ethnic sub-nationalist groups like the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra and other Igbo ethnic nationalist movements in Nigeria. Self-determination or secession remains an option for Igbo ethnic nationalist movements, looking back at the Civil War

atrocities, marginalization, exploitation, injustices, official discriminations, human rights violations and abuses, perpetuated by the state on its people. The vicious bombing of the Syrian city of Aleppo all too well shows to what extent governments can go to resist opposition to state sovereignty or punish dissident voices within their national enclave. Mass protests or peaceful rallies against governments are internationally recognised and accepted methods of expressing discontent by a people towards the way they are being governed or ruled. In recent times there have been mass protests against the presidents of South Korea, Malaysia and even Donald Trump, the president of the United States. Extra-judicial killing of unarmed, non-violent IPOB protesters by government forces remains unacceptable by any standard. Currently, Ukraine's former president, Viktor Yanukovich is facing trial at the International Criminal Court for ordering soldiers to shoot at unarmed protesters.

IPOB is yet to understand the correlation between mass mobilization and militant leadership the way other separatist groups in Nigeria do. Though there are insinuations in some quarters (social media, mainstream media and government media) that IPOB is behind the current attacks on security installations in the southeast region. There is no evidence to that, other than videos posted on line by security agents of captured criminals being interrogated in police cell confessing to be members of IPOB. These are questionable pieces of evidence, also as IPOB has openly denounced such. What IPOB has openly supported is the creation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) which is tasked to operate in the forests of the Southeast to exterminate the armed killer Fulani herdsmen, who are behind the killing and kidnapping of farmers and innocent civilians in the region. There are also insinuations that the government is funding and fueling the attacks and insecurity in the southeast by using plain-clothes security agents who attack high profile civilian targets in the southeast region. These two groups of unknown gunmen operating in the southeast have one slight difference i.e. their modus operandi. One group attack security personnel, police stations, army checkpoints and within a period of time they get caught and killed by security operatives, they do not attack or kill civilians and when they move about, they are normally hailed by citizens. The second group kills only high-profile citizens and are never caught by the security agencies. They strike and disappear into thin air. All this is separately from the usual kidnapping done by criminal gangs and Fulani herdsmen within the southeast where ransom is demanded, negotiated and paid. These two groups of unknown gunmen attack to make a statement but the normal criminal elements perpetuate crime for money.

The Boko Haram sect at its inception had a leader Yusuf Mohammed, a civilian, and its activities were restricted to violent riots, demonstrations and sectarian killings. But with the death of Yusuf at the hands of the Nigerian state and the emergence of Shekau Abubakar (who is believed to have received military training in terror training camps outside the country) the game changed from one of violent civil demonstrations to military style insurgency against soft and hard targets. In such manner the Boko Haram insurgency exposed the weaknesses of the Nigerian security forces like never seen before. This was

embarrassing for Nigeria because it was not a political or ethnic conflict but a religious one occurring in secular Nigeria. Similarly, the Niger Delta conflict, under Ken Saro Wiwa, Niger Delta communities had their agitations over environmental degradation and resource control limited to carrying placards, demonstrations and occupying oil rigs and platforms but when Asari Dokubo returned from Libyan training camps where he acquired military skills, this changed the game in the Niger Delta. The militant leadership provided by Asari escalated the conflict, as a result the oil rich region and by extension Nigeria's economy were ground almost to a complete halt. Till date the region is still having pockets of armed insurgents who rise up and challenge the authorities when they feel neglected. This correlation between mass mobilization and militant leadership also was the trigger to the 1967 – 1970 Civil War in Nigeria, a three-year conflict that claimed almost 2 million lives. Lt. Col. Ojukwu was an army officer; hence Biafra was able to secede and run a government away from the Nigerian state for 3 years. If Ojukwu had been a civilian, he may not have towed the part of war. As at the time of writing this paper, the federal government had succeeded in carrying out a military exercise tagged Python dance II which saw to the disappearance of Mazi Nnamdi Kalu, another military exercise named Python Dance III has been scheduled for the Southeast by military authorities and also carried out. Finally, if government is desperate to silence Nnamdi Kalu and suppress Igbo ethnic nationalism, it should note two things; first of all, Biafra separatism has become an ideology, like a spirit, it can't be killed or shot dead. If the core issues are not addressed on the negotiation table generations to come will still agitate for Biafra because this generation currently agitating for secession were not born during the 1967 Civil War. Secondly, the life of Nnamdi Kalu must be precious in the sight of the federal government as his replacement may have a military background.

In conclusion, a negotiation process has to be initiated and a peace process designed by the federal government inviting key stakeholders and parties to the conflict in the Southeast for dialogue on the Biafra dispute. In a broad view the current political structure needs to be rearranged via restructuring to allow different regions develop at their own pace bearing in mind that Nigeria is a multi-national state hence the different cultural and religious backgrounds must be addressed. These concepts will importantly boost the image of the federal authorities, locally and internationally, and restore confidence in governance.