

**PAN-AFRICANISM IN PRAXIS: INVESTIGATING THE BIAFRAN SECESSION
AND ITS LESSONS FOR POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN STATEHOOD**

by

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Abstract: *This research aims to examine the history of the Nigerian-Biafran civil war and the Biafran secessionist state. Current scholarship frames the Nigerian-Biafran civil war as an example of tribal conflict between the minority Igbo tribe in the southeast and predominant tribes in the north but fails to contextualize the war as an iteration of Pan-Africanism. This research utilizes interviews and national archival material in order to uncover Pan-Africanist modes of self-determination within the Biafran secessionist state. Further, this Pan-Africanist mode of self-determination could also be used as a resource to question dominant and prevailing practices of African state creation and provide a different approach through which to address the lingering socio-economic issues that afflict Nigeria (and many other African countries) today. The research will consist of interviews with 20 Igbo adults ages 21-50 that currently reside in Nigeria, coupled with visits to the National War Museum and the Historical Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra in Umuahaia, Abia State, Nigeria to analyze and document preserved relics of the Biafran secessionist state and its subsequent war.*

INTRODUCTION

On June 27th, 2021, the Indigenous People of Biafra organization's leader— Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was arrested and extradited from Kenya to Nigeria to face trial for a total of 11 felony charges (Busari & Princewill, 2021). Kanu was originally arrested on October 14th, 2015, for felony charges including but not limited to terrorism, treasonable felony, managing an unlawful society, publication of defamatory material against the Nigerian government, and the illegal possession of firearms but fled the country after being released on bail (Busari & Princewill, 2021). Not long after Kanu's extradition on October 8th, 2021, the famous Nollywood actor, comedian, and philanthropist Chiwetalu Agu was arrested, detained, and beaten by Nigerian Army officers for wearing an outfit made from the Biafran flag (see Figure 1) (BBC Pidgin 2021). He was arrested in Onitsha, Anambra State shortly after purchasing loaves of bread for passing bus drivers and passengers (BBC Pidgin 2021).

Figure 1
Photo of Chiwetalu Agu shortly before his arrest



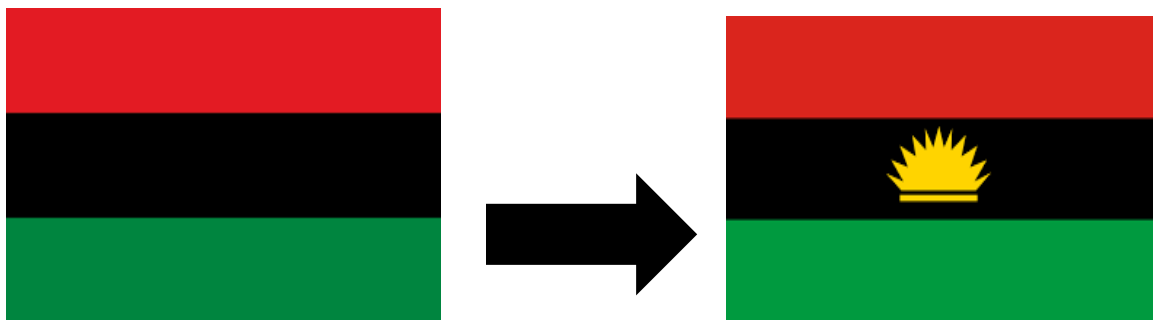
Considering that Biafra has been widely recognized as a historical moment in Nigerian history, questions regarding the seemingly sudden interest in Biafra have justifiably unfolded. Why would Nnamdi Kanu be arrested for charges of terrorism? What would cause Nigerian Army officers to arrest, detain, and assault a prominent actor for what appears to be a simple fashion statement? Why would Chiwetelu Agu be wearing an outfit displaying the Biafran flag in 2021, if the Biafran war ended in 1970? These questions are imperative to understanding how the idea of Biafra is not solely situated in the past, but instead found present in the contemporary context. The Nigerian Army's decision to arrest Agu and Kanu for Biafran-related crimes expose a current desire for a new Biafran state amongst people in the southeastern (Biafran territorial) region. Additionally, Chiwetelu's arrest has also destabilized Nigeria's colonially constructed borders.

As stated previously, Chiwetelu Agu's Biafran-related crime was his decision to wear clothing that displayed the Biafran flag, meaning, the Nigerian Army perceived the symbolism associated with Biafra as a threat to public safety and Nigeria at-large. Social movements throughout history are often associated with symbols that signify the

movement's principles and represent its aspirations for the future. The symbolism of the Biafran flag alone resulted in the arrest of Agu but, considering that the Biafran Flag appears to be derivative of the Universal Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA) Pan-African flag— one might presume that both the 1967 Biafran movement and its contemporary iterations contain semblances of Pan-Africanist ideologies, and that these semblances were also perceived as a threat by Agu's arresting officers (UNIACL).

Figure 2

The horizontal tricolor of the Pan-African Flag (right) appears in the Biafran flag (left)



The horizontal tricolored flag of the UNIA represents a Pan-Africanist ideology, similar to the Biafran flag which replicates the horizontal tricolor, and therefore suggests a Pan-Africanist ideology. There has been little examination of the ideologies and symbolism of the 1967 Biafran secessionist state due to dominant colonial narratives that centralize ethnic conflict in the Biafran story. For example, the Pan-Africanist ideological perspectives of the 1967 Biafran secessionist state leader— Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, have been overlooked in popular analyses of the Biafran secession and its subsequent war.

If the intertwined existence of Pan-Africanism and Biafra stands, as I argue it does, then the nuanced and layered relationship between the two begs one to reexamine Biafra, not as merely an ethnic conflict but altogether as a novel iteration of Pan-Africanist praxis toward anti- and decolonial struggle and liberation. Seen intimately in the popular *Radio Biafra* talk show founded and hosted by Kanu in 2009, which later prompted him to

establish the Indigenous People of Biafra organization in 2012– the idea and place of Biafra as a Republic has not left the consciousness of people in Southeast Nigeria. As such, if Biafra is not a thing of the past but an idea, a belief, a way of living, and a practice of resistance against colonially imposed borders that long sustains in the present, one must then rethink and reexplore how Igbo people have evaluated the Biafran succession and its subsequent war.

This study is intended to examine the 1967 Biafran secession in tandem with the contemporary Biafran secession to assess its lingering implications. In order to do this, one must understand the context in which the Biafran secession emerged, the relationship between Igbo people in Southeastern Nigeria and the rest of the country, and the political ideologies that have informed these movements.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic Identity and Minorities in Nigeria

Andreas Wimmer’s “The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory” defines *ethnicity* as a “subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry” (p. 972, 2008). The author continues by clarifying the explanation of the term’s use, proclaiming that individuals also use the term to denote “cultural practices that appear to be typical amongst the community, myths regarding a similar historical origin, and the similarity of physical characteristics (p. 977, 2008).

On the other hand, many scholars of African history describe ethnic identities and “tribes” as a colonial imposition on the lives of Africans. More specifically, the work of Oluwatoyin Oduntan and Dennis Laumann’s both describe the identifying labels of “tribes” as a tool to make the administrative aspect of colonial rule easier (2019; 2018). African

people under colonial rule were divided according to similar linguistic, religious, and cultural practices for the sake of establishing and maintaining order, but as stated by Laumann “This drive for order even resulted in tribes being invented where they did not exist” (Laumann, p. 32, 2018). In other words, Laumann could be arguing that tribes in Africa were constructed not for the benefit and unification of native Africans but for the sake of European colonizers to maintain a sense of structure in their respective territories. Further, Oduntan places this idea in the context of Nigeria. Oduntan states “the invention and ossification of tribes in Nigeria was a colonial strategy to justify conquest and rule” (Oduntan p. 19, 2019). With this, Oduntan crafts an argument to emphasize the arbitrary nature of a minority status in Nigeria. By deconstructing the conception of a minority ethnic group within Nigeria, this scholar reveals that colonially constructed tribal identities “privileged a few ethnic groups” while solidifying a minority ethnic consciousness among tribes who were excluded (p.20, 2019). Further, Oduntan states that ethnic identity and the “minority question” has been a reoccurring element in Nigerian politics (p.20, 2019). Considering this, questions pertaining to tribal majority and minority agitations are also worth assessing.

Emmanuel Osewe Akubor’s “Willink’s Report, Niger Delta Region and the Nigerian State 50 Years After: Any Hope for the Minority?” describes minority agitation regionally as opposed to a national phenomenon. More specifically Akubor states, “In this way, three majority groups were consolidated in the context of the creation of the three regions in 1946, which resulted in each majority ethnic group constituting a ‘core’ ethno-political group in its respective region, namely the Hausa–Fulani in the Northern Region, the Yoruba in the Western Region and the Igbo in the Eastern Region.” (p. 166, 2017). This description implies that political power was equally distributed amongst each core ethnic

group and fails to name the hierarchical power dynamics which exist as a lingering implication of colonial rule amongst larger ethnic groups today. A closer look of the literature pertaining to ethnic identity, and minority consciousness, however, reveals a number of gaps and shortcomings in its utility. Understanding the origins of ethnicity, tribal identity and ethnic conflict is imperative in beginning to assess the Biafran secession.

History of the Biafran War and Secession

Renown writer and thinker, Chinua Achebe spoke explicitly to his experience of the Biafran Secession and its subsequent war in his memoir which provides insight into the common explanations for the war. Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* describes the events which led to the Nigeria Biafra war through a twofold explanation of both the "Biafran Position" and the "Nigerian Argument" (Achebe 2012, 95). Achebe claims that the beginnings of the Biafran war were commonly understood to be a result of the January 15, 1966, coup d'état coupled with the reactions to the coup. The coup was enacted by Northern Nigerian military officers and resulted in the murders of nearly 200 Igbo individuals coupled with the massacre of approximately 30,000 civilians in the Eastern region of Nigeria by May of 1966 (Achebe 2012, 95). Essentially, this ecosystem of perpetual violence resulted in many Eastern Nigerians migrating back to their homelands in the East as a means of evading possible death. Further, Achebe claims that the Nigerian government did not respond to the calls from Eastern Nigerians and Igbo people to end the "pogroms" and massacres (Achebe 2012, 96). This environment of perpetual violence against Eastern Nigerians and minimal federal government protection then led to Eastern Nigerians calling on secession as a means of self-protection. In response to the Biafran secessionist demands, Achebe claims that the Nigerian federal government "was hinged on the premise that if Biafra was allowed to secede then a number of other ethnic nationalities

within Nigeria would follow suit. The Nigerian government, therefore, had to block Biafra's secession to prevent the dissolution of Nigeria" (Achebe 2012, 97).

Contrastingly, the ways that most scholars categorize the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War— has been consistently examined within the context of genocidal violence. For example, Lasse Heerten and A. Dirk Moses explore the claims of genocide in their article "The Nigeria-Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide". Heerten and Moses assert that accusations of genocide across the country were "elemental to the Biafran propaganda campaign" and that minority groups within the Biafran territory had their genocidal experience invalidated by the Nigerian government and international media (2014, 173). These authors also assert that the propaganda campaign from Biafran leadership functioned as an organizing tool with the hopes of constructing a unified Biafran identity. However, these scholars fail to explore the Pan-Africanist ideological beliefs that could have also unified Biafran struggle.

According to Heerten and Moses, the Biafran war made global news headlines due to prominent journalists and scholars of the region reporting on the lethal famine— which emerged because of Nigeria's Federal Military Government (FMG) blockading the secessionist Republic of Biafra from receiving food and resources (Heerten and Moses 2014, 177). This blockade manifested through Nigeria's FMG banning foreign currency transactions, blocking incoming mail or telecommunication, and essentially disconnecting Biafra from the outside world by blockading air and seaports in the southeastern region which made up the secessionist state of Biafra (Heerten and Moses 2014, 177).

Similar to Heerten and Moses, Douglas Anthony centralizes genocide in his assessment of the Biafran war. "'Ours is a War of Survival': Biafra, Nigeria, and arguments about genocide, 1966-1970" by Douglas Anthony argues that "Belief in Nigeria's genocidal

intentions became a central tenet of emergent Biafran nationalism” evident through various publications which alluded to massacres of Eastern Nigerians (2014, 206). The author attributes much of the apparent support for the Biafran secessionist project to the use of “propagandist publications” such as the “*Biafra Newsletter*”, and “*The Case for Biafra*”, which utilized language such as “genocide”, “extermination”, and “pogrom” in describing the series of violent attacks following the 1966 military coup (Anthony 2015, 210). S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli claim that the terms “pogrom” and “genocide” emerged as a result of Igbo people’s descriptions of the violence occurring outside of their ancestral homes (2014, 380). Further, Bird and Ottanelli assert that the Biafran war commenced due to Chukwuemeka Ojukwu’s argument that Igbos were no longer safe within the northern and western parts of Nigeria—as well as the eastern region of Nigeria (2014, 382). As a result, Chukwuemeka Ojukwu declared the predominantly Igbo Eastern region of Nigeria as the sovereign secessionist state of Biafra (Bird and Ottanelli 2014, 382).

Emefiena Ezeani’s book *In Biafra Africa Died: The Diplomatic Plot* assesses the Biafran war as not only a secession effort made by the Igbo people of the Southeast, but he also includes the often-overlooked minority tribes which were part of the Biafran territory such as the Efik, Ijaw, Ibibo, and Ogoja (Ezeani 2014, 62). While much of the literature on the Biafran war reifies Igbo hegemony over the Biafran territory, Ezeani provides a holistic account of the Biafran territory. Moreover, this author claims that the leader of the Biafran secessionist state—Chief Emmanuel Odemogwu Ojukwu fostered an environment for “technological ingenuity and inventiveness that might have, if allowed, taken African development on a different course today.” (Ezeani 2014,139). Ezeani’s work also establishes the Biafran secession and its subsequent genocidal war as a tragedy comparable to “killing the Industrial Revolution in Britain” (Ezeani 2014,139). Like Heerten and Moses,

Ezeani includes the millions of lives lost leading up to and during the war as a central theme in Biafra's historical relevance (Ezeani, 2014; Heerten and Moses, 2014). A review of the literature pertaining to Biafra proves otherwise with a variety of scholars providing a nuanced analysis of the Biafran secessionist project and civil war such as Arua Omaka's "The Forgotten Victims of the Civil War" (2014).

Several theoretical frameworks through which scholars understand the Biafran war have emerged in recent years. Some authors have emphasized the experiences and contributions of women amid the Biafran war. For example, the work of Christie Achebe which applies psychological life span theory of primary and secondary control to the experiences of Nigerian women during and after the Biafran war. Achebe's study explores whether women demonstrated a sense of agency or rather, succumbed to a feeling of helplessness in the wake of the Biafran war (Achebe, 2010). Achebe's findings grouped Nigerian women's roles during the war into six broad categories which include the following: literary contributions, political roles, economic mobilization, nutrition/welfare/education, military roles, and control strategies (2010, 787). Achebe found that Nigerian women demonstrated a variety of these roles but most of the were in welfare positions where they helped to ration and distribute food for children and men at the front lines of war (2010, 787). This study provides insight into the ways that women were active during the war as many scholars primarily focus on the experiences of men during the war.

Pan Africanism, Self- Determination, Black Internationalism, and Post-Colonial Theories

According to Hall, the term "post-colonial" and its utility (or lack thereof) in describing colonized regions. Essentially, the term implies a climax and ending to the era of

colonialism rather than a continuation in new terms (Hall, 1996). In the contemporary context the term also became synonymous with the lingering implications of colonial rule such as neo-colonialism, imperialism, resistance etc. (Hall 1996). This, in turn, renders the utility of terms such as neo-colonialism and imperialism– unable to explicitly describe current exploitation of previously colonized countries. Hall continues by stating that other critiques of the term allude to the ways it forces “a suspension of history” through an overly simplified linear examination rather than a complex non-linear analysis (1996). Further, Hall demonstrates that the term has been used primarily for “academic marketability in the Western world” while many people in previously colonized areas do not use the term (Hall 1996). In sum, Hall asserts that “post-colonial” offers a pseudo critique rendering a complicit attitude towards the colonial powers today and insists upon a binate distinction of good/bad periods of history all while insisting that today– the “post-colonial period” is indeed, a good period in history (Hall 1996).

Kristina Roepstorff’s “The Politics of Self Determination: Beyond the Decolonization Process” presents the concept of self-determination as a fundamental principle in struggles for political freedom (2012, 9). Further, Roepstorff explains that the idea of self-determination is also emphasized in international human rights law. More specifically, common Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights states (ICESCR) “All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.” (Roepstorff 2012, 26; ICCPR and ICESR 1976, Common Article 1).

Regional human rights organizations such as the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, also adapted articles which not only emphasized self-determination, but also spoke

directly to the experience of colonized people and countries (Roepstorff 2012, p.27). The African Charter on Human and People's Rights states

“Colonized or oppressed peoples shall have the right to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognized by the international community. All peoples shall have the right to the assistance of the States parties to the present Charter in their liberation struggle against foreign domination, be it political, economic, or cultural.” (African [Banju] Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 1981).

This author continues by asserting that African states have rejected the principle of self-determination due to heterogeneity and have instead opted to maintain their territorial integrity by promoting national unity (Roepstorff 2012, 27). This is evident in all countries within the African continent as they have maintained their colonially constructed borders rather than establishing new ones. Roepstorff fails to mention the African nations which have attempted to assert their right to self-determination but were met with violence. Take, for instance, the Biafran secession and its subsequent civil war. The predominantly Igbo eastern region of Nigeria attempted to establish its own sovereign nation (Biafra) but were met with military violence not only by Nigeria's military, but from foreign aid such as Italy, the United States, and its former colonial ruler— Britain.

Brad Simpson's “The Biafran Secession and the Limits of Self Determination” describes the Biafran secession as “the Biafran Revolution” and claims that this revolution “had become, for many, a symbol of the exhaustion of postcolonial optimism, the horrors of civil war” and the necessity of self-determination (2017, 120). Simpson also claims that both supporters and opponents of Biafra viewed the Biafran secession and its subsequent war as “an important moment in the history of self-determination as a political and legal principle.” (2017, 122). On the other hand, many international spectators adapted a negative orientation towards the Nigerian-Biafran situation because as Biafran leaders spoke about self-determination, Western world leaders interpreted this as merely secession (Simpson

2017, 128). In sum, the author concludes, stating that despite Biafra's failed secession attempt, the "Biafran Revolution" called attention to the following question: "Can Africa be better unified on the basis of the colonial boundaries, or could a lasting unity be achieved on the basis of self-determination for various African people?" (2017, 130). Simpson's question is also important in the overall analysis of the Biafran secession as an iteration of an-Africanist self-determination.

Aubrey Bonnet appears to expand on the idea of unity by defining Pan-Africanism as "the unification of Africa through the destruction of European colonialism" (2019). Bonnet also emphasizes the unification of people of African descent across the world, including people from the West Indies and the Americas (2019). Harry Odamtten's "Critical Departures in the Practice of Pan-Africanism in the New Millennium" presents a similar definition, writing "I define Pan-Africanism as the idea that people of African descent, no matter the geographic location, share diverse historical, cultural, sociological, and kinship ties given their collective origins on the African continent" (2019).

Many scholars emphasize Pan-Africanism as not only a conceptual understanding of the lineages of African people but also as a movement. This movement manifested in academic works and political organization (Bonnet 2019; Falola, Toyin, and Kwame p.45, 2014). In terms of political organization, Vincent Dodoo and Wilhelmina Donkoh assert that a "Pan-Africanist state" would be the result of Pan-Africanism in practice (p. 153, 2014). These authors also claim that there is little consensus in the movement of where this "Pan-Africanist" state would be located (Dodoo and Donkoh p.153, 2014). Contrastingly, Odamtten asserts that Pan-Africanism takes shape in three iterations or "trends"—including "intellectual Pan-Africanism", "cultural-religious Pan-Africanism" and "political Pan-Africanism" (p. 176, 2019). While intellectual Pan-Africanism conveys the academic and

systematic study of Africa and its diaspora in order to rectify the current conditions of these regions through a promotion of unity, political Pan-Africanism pertains to the political activism, agitation, demonstration, and organization aimed at uprooting the socioeconomic conditions of all Black people globally (Odamtten p.173, 2019).

Charisse Burden-Stelly and Gerald Horne's "From Pan-Africanism to Black Internationalism" describes Black Internationalism as a conceptual framework which emphasizes a "form of Pan-African activism, organizing, strategy, and scholarship that elucidates the particular ways that Black anti-capitalists have mobilized Pan-Africanism to radical ends" (Burden-Stelly and Horne p.71, 2020). They claim that Black Internationalism has emerged as a "trans-territorial" embodiment of Pan-African visions after its expansion after World War II (Burden-Stelly and Horne p.70, 2020). Further, Black Internationalism consist of six primary elements including the following: "anti-white supremacy/continental unity, anti-colonialism/self-determination, anti-imperialism/revolutionary transformation, anti-capitalism/socialism, anti-sexism/radical Black humanism, and anti-war/durable peace" (Burden-Stelly and Horne 2020). Contrastingly, despite Black Internationalism descent from Pan-Africanism ideology– Black internationalism is described to be "ideologically and geopolitically distinct" from Pan-Africanism (Burden-Stelly and Horne p. 70, 2020). According to these authors, Pan-Africanism is a term used to describe the ideas, organizing methods and movements concerned with the emancipation of African people on the African Continent and within the African Diaspora globally (Burden-Stelly, Horne, 2020).

As can be seen by the literature, ethnicity and ethnic relations are very complicated. Historians such as Laumann and Oduntan demonstrate the complex creation of ethnic identities in Nigeria and argue that they were colonial constructions. While on the other

hand, political self-determination and Pan-Africanism produce similar political outcomes but are informed by different political ideologies. While Scholars such as Brad Simpson assess the Biafran secession using a self-determination political framework, understanding Pan-Africanism and Black Internationalism allows one to critically examine the Biafran secession of 1967 and the current Biafran movement using a Pan-Africanist framework, Black Internationalist, and Black Nationalist framework.

CHAPTER 2:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate Biafran secession and war.

The primary research questions guiding this research are as follows: What was the legacy of the Biafran Secession/War and what lessons does it have for post-colonial African statehood? Further, has the Biafran identity continued to be developed in the years following colonization? This study is intended to investigate the ways that Igbo adults in Nigeria have identified themselves in the subsequent generations after the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War and Biafran Secession. This research will also explore whether the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War has been taught in schools, discussed in communities, and presented in Nigerian national memorabilia in order to assess the prevailing national narratives of the 1967 Biafran secessionist movement. Lastly, this research will assess current Biafran discourse as portrayed in the *Radio Biafra* broadcasts and discussed on the social media app Clubhouse.

Design of the Study

The design of this study will draw upon West African oral traditions of sharing knowledge and history through a storytelling practice. Scholars have described storytelling as “A method of recording and expressing feelings attitudes, and responses of one’s lived experiences and environment.” (Tuwe p.2, 2016). In constructing this qualitative study, the researcher established a set of interview questions which aim to reveal each participant’s sense of self-identity, their sentiments towards a potential Biafran nation, and the dominant and prevailing historical narratives of the Biafran secession and civil war. Additionally, interviews were semi-structured with approximately 10 pre-determined questions and various follow-up questions based on the participant’s response in order to encourage participants to carefully reflect on their experiences and the experiences of others and provide detailed narratives with consideration to the historical context in which those experiences occurred. Each interview was conducted in the Southeastern region of Nigeria—specifically Isulo, Anambra State and Achi, Enugu State—which denote the former Biafran territory (Achebe 2012, 90).

In conjunction with the qualitative interview study, the researcher also visited the National War Museum and the former Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra—colloquially known as Chukwuemeka’s Odumegwu Ojukwu’s Bunker—to investigate the prevailing national narrative of the Biafran secession and War as represented through its archival materials. Both the Museum and the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra are federally funded and preserved historic sites in Umuahia, Abia State in southeastern Nigeria. During the visit to the historic sites, the researcher also interviewed a tour guide that was employed by one of the historic sites.

The researcher also conducted observational research on the social media app Clubhouse (which has been named to be a primary organizing tool for Nigerians to discuss

and strategize methods to secession) and listened to approximately 30 hours of the *Radio Biafra* broadcasts to further contextualize contemporary secessionist movements in Nigeria. Clubhouse is a social networking app which centralizes audio discussions, allowing people to create “chat-rooms” with different topics for people to discuss and listen from other users. For this study, the researcher examined Nigerian secessionist chat rooms that were mentioned by interview participants during interviews. While *Radio Biafra* is a talk radio show hosted by the leader of the IPOB organization—Nnamdi Kanu. Listening and examining Radio Biafra provided insight into the ideologies of IPOB and Kanu, and allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the political ideologies of the 1967 Biafran leader as well as the contemporary Biafran leader.

Participants

With the purpose of capturing the lingering implications of and contemporary understandings of the Biafran civil war, the researcher opted to interview 20 individuals between the ages 21 and 50 within the Enugu State and Anambra State which were both former Biafran territory. Participants were required to be born and raised in the southeastern region of Nigeria in order to gain the perspectives of those who are directly affected by the consequences of the Biafra secession and civil war. Participants were primarily recruited using the snowball sampling method. Mahin Naderifar, Hamideh Goli, and Fereshteh Ghaljaie describe snowball sampling as a qualitative research method where existing subjects aid in recruiting study participants amongst their acquaintances and social groups (2017). The first six participants were recruited through asking family friends to participate in the research study or in other words, they were recruited using a convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling methods are described to include members of the

target population who are readily available to the researcher (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017).

Data Collection

All participants who agreed to engage in this study were immediately informed of the purpose of this study, which is to explore how Igbo people in Southeastern Nigeria perceive of their self-identity and a potential future Biafran nation in the subsequent generations after the Biafran civil War. Next, participants were given an informed consent form which outlined the thematic elements of the questions and went into greater detail regarding the purpose of the study. Participants were also reminded that their participation in the study is completely voluntary and confidential. Once participants read and signed the informed consent forms, one-on-interviews commenced.

One-one-interviews provided participants the opportunity to narrate their experiences and perspectives as it related to the topic at hand. Considering the nature of this study, each interview was audio recorded using an audio recording application on an iPad device. Interviews took place in a private area to preserve and ensure confidentiality. During the conversation, the researcher took notes in order to inform the transcription process. Once 20 interviews were collected, each interview was then transcribed with the help of an artificial intelligence software with transcription capabilities.

During the visit to the National War Museum and the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra, data was collected through direct observation and capturing digital images and videos of national memorabilia pertaining to the Biafran war and secession. These memorabilia will allow the researcher to contextualize the prevailing national narrative as it relates to the Biafran secession. Within the National War Museum, the researcher visited the open-air exhibit, the traditional-modern warfare exhibit, and the

“Voice of Biafra Radio” bunker. These images and videos were taken with an iPhone camera with the verbal permission of museum employees. The interview with the museum employee was informal and took place after the tour but was also recorded using an audio recording application with the museum guide’s verbal informed consent. The *Radio Biafra* broadcasts were observed on the *Radio Biafra* website as the researcher recorded notes on approximately 30 hours of broadcasts.

Data Analysis Process

This research aims to explore how Igbo individuals have identified themselves in the following generations of the Biafran secession and civil war. Also, this research intends to assess the prevailing narratives regarding the Biafran secession and civil war in conjunction with the perspectives of Igbo individuals who were born and raised in the subsequent generations using interviews. For these reasons, the responses of the 20 participants were assessed for common thematic and conceptual elements. Interview responses were also grouped according to four general sections which illustrate common thematic or conceptual elements. The sections are: “Past and Prevailing Narratives of the Biafran Secession”; “Current Biafran Discourse”; “Self-Identity”; and “Future of Biafra”. In these sections, the findings and responses of these interviews will be presented primarily using extracted quotes from participant’s responses and paraphrased articulations of pertinent concepts and themes. Additionally, images of memorabilia within the National War Museum and the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra will be presented under the “Past and Prevailing Narratives of the Biafran Secession” section. While observations on the Clubhouse social networking app and the *Radio Biafra* website will be presented under the “Current Biafran Discourse” section.

Limitations

This research however is subject a few limitations (some of which include sample bias and the design of this research study.) According to the World Population Review, as of 2018 the population of Igbo people in Nigeria is approximately 40 million. The findings of one-on-one interviews with 20 individuals is not an accurate representation of the ideas of Igbo people as a collective. Further, the sampling method used to recruit participants is considered a convenience sampling method as it recruits participants of the target population that are in proximity to the researcher (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). The snowball sampling method also utilizes the assistance of research participants to recruit more participants within the target population to participate in the research study. As a result, the sample group is not a completely randomized group of participants and does not represent a completely random array of interview responses. As stated by Naderifar, Goli, and Ghaljaie “The purpose of qualitative research [such as one-on-interviews] is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomena rather than generalizing the findings” (2017). As such, this limitation has not hindered the researcher from drawing conclusions based on interview responses but future research on this subject should ideally aim to recruit a larger random selection of the target population.

However, the design of the study centralizes the experiences, self-identification, and perspectives of Igbo individuals as it relates to the former Republic of Biafra. Arua Omaka explains that the former Republic of Biafra was not only comprised of Igbo individuals, but it also included other tribes such as the Ibibio, Ijaw and Efik (p.26, 2014). More specifically, the former Republic of Biafra was comprised of 67 percent Igbo people, with the remaining 33 percent consisting of the Ibibio, Ijaw, and Efik tribes (Omak p.27, 2014). Essentially, by designing this research study to exclude a portion of the population of the former Republic of Biafra, one could argue that the researcher might be practicing hegemonic tribalism

which negates the experiences of smaller ethnic groups in the region. Future research studies pertaining to Biafra should aim to include and centralize the experiences of Ibibio, Ijaw, and Efik people because these tribes were also directly impacted by the Biafran secession and civil war.

CHAPTER 3:

DATA FINDINGS

As stated previously, the researcher conducted interviews with 20 Igbo individuals ages 21–50 who were born and raised in the southeastern region of Nigeria. Participants were expected to answer approximately 10 questions which pertained to four general themes of the main research question. Considering that the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview method to collect data, many interviews included follow-up questions based on the participant's response to pre-determined interview questions. Further, the digital images and observations of archival materials, and written text within the National War Museum and the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra have also been included within the four general themes. These four general themes include the following: past and prevailing narratives of the Biafran secession; the current Biafran discourse; self-identity; and the potential future for Biafra.

Table 1

<u>THEME</u>	<u>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</u>
Past and Prevailing Narratives of the Biafran Secession/War	- Within your school environment and curriculum, did you learn about the Biafran secession?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within your home, did your family discuss the Biafran secession and its subsequent war at all? If so, what were the stories they shared with you? - What do you know about the Biafran flag?
Current Biafran Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The famous Nollywood actor Chiwetelu Agu was reportedly arrested by Onitsha police officers for wearing an outfit made from the Biafran flag. How do you feel about the response from the Onitsha police officers? - Within the past year, how often have you brought up Biafra in casual conversations with peers or family members? - What have you heard about the Indigenous People of Biafra Organization (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu? - For some Igbo people, the Biafran flag is a symbol of revolution and pride and a symbol of mourning and defeat. When you see the Biafran flag, what does it symbolize for you?
Self-Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you could identify with only one of the following labels (Igbo, Biafran, Nigerian, African) which label would you use to describe yourself and why?
Potential Future of Biafra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the possibility of creating a new Biafra nation presented itself, would you be in support of its establishment? Why or why not?

Past and Prevailing Narratives of the Biafran Secession

Interview participants disclosed information they've learned from school and from their families. In sum, all participants learned about the Biafran war from conversations with family members that have lived during the war while many did not receive any formal instruction pertaining to the Biafran war within their primary or secondary schooling. Further, the National War Museum and Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra provided insight into the national perceptions and narratives of the 1967 Biafran secession.

NARRATIVES WITHIN SCHOOL

When asked to describe any information participants had learned about the Biafran war and secession within their school environments, majority of respondents stated that not

only did they never receive instructional material pertaining to the Biafran war, but most primary and secondary schools did not offer history courses. Few that claimed they did receive instruction stated that they received instruction on the basic facts of the war, but they did not go into detail. One 38-year-old respondent spoke directly of his experience as a vice-principal of a secondary school stating:

“There's nothing like history this period. I'm a teacher. I'm a vice principal of a school. So presently, there's no subject called history this period. They stopped it long ago... In primary school, they taught history a little, about the Biafran civil war, but it was just an elementary part of it. Then in my secondary school, we still did a small part of it. At that point, they cut it off entirely.” (Interview 3)

This respondent clearly states that, currently, there are no history classes being taught at the school he currently works at. Though, he states that during primary and secondary school he learned about the Biafran war sparingly.

The researcher also asked respondents to speculate why the schools they attended did not provide thorough educational instruction pertaining to the Biafran war however, many participants claimed that Nigeria was attempting to conceal the truth of the brutal nature of the war. Additionally, some respondents assumed that education pertaining to the Biafran war would lead to further agitations from Igbo people today. Take for instance, the response from a 49-year-old participant, stating the following:

“It's actually important to include Biafra and the secession story in the school curriculum. But Nigeria is a multi-ethnic community, and some people believe that the Biafran memory should be completely erased because the agitational secession was not welcomed by all tribes. They probably believe that if you continue to portray that– if you continue to disseminate that information, that it would lead to more thoughts from people, regarding agitations for secession. So, they deliberately excluded it from the curriculum” (Interview 17).

Similarly, a 29-year-old respondent succinctly expressed:

“In the curriculum they skipped it. They removed it entirely. It doesn't exist in the curriculum [...] Because they're hiding the truth [...] the way that the whole thing happened – it was a genocide.” (Interview 1).

FAMILIAL NARRATIVES

When participants were asked whether Biafra was discussed within their home and amongst their family, all participants responded affirmatively. Additionally, all the respondents gave detailed accounts of the events their parents, grandparents and elder relatives endured during the war. Some respondents also disclosed conversations with family members that were solely political and critical in nature. This 33-year-old participant explained how her family held Nigeria's first president (Nnamdi Azikiwe) responsible for the Biafran War:

“Yes, sometimes my people would always talk about Biafra and how [Nnamdi] Azikiwe, were among the people that have led us into this very problem of ‘one Nigeria, one Nigeria’. But assuming that they had stood their ground, we Biafrans would no longer be under Nigeria by now. So, at the end of the whole thing now, the one Nigeria is not what they were seeing. That’s why the war even started.” (Interview 10)

Another 33-year-old participant provided an elaborate exposition of her father's memories of hiding from Biafran soldiers before he was taken to the warfront as a child soldier. She stated:

“My father participated in the civil war. He told me how the initial war time— he didn’t want to join war so there was a place they normally hide people. They will hide the young guys maybe from 12 years [old]. The army and the soldiers, they normally come to carry those boys to participate in the war. So, then my daddy particularly— my grandparents would normally hide him somewhere. They'll dig a whole to hide them and after— when the army wants to start collecting boys they'll signal by maybe [letting off] a gun shot. When they hear a gunshot, people will know that soldiers are coming to take them. Sometimes they will search the whole village [and] they will not see them. After, the parents would carry them home. In every kindred they have a particular place they hide the boys.” (Interview 20)

THE BIAFRAN FLAG

Participants were asked to provide a summary of information pertaining to what they knew about the Biafran flag. The Biafran Flag was designed by the leader of the 1967

Biafran secessionist movement, Ojukwu For context, the Biafran flag consists of a horizontal tricolor of red, black, and green with a golden rising sun in the center. The golden rising sun also includes eleven sun rays and represents the eleven former states of Biafra. The flag also mirrors the appearance of Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanist Universal Improvement Association flag therefore, participants were asked to provide an explanation of the symbolism of the flag. A total of fifteen participants out of the twenty interviewed were able to accurately describe the color and design of the Biafran flag. Of these fifteen participants, only three were able to provide a symbolic meaning of the Biafran flag. A 49-year-old respondent answered the question with uncertainty stating the following:

“I assume it displays the land of the rising sun? Because I'm not sure but I'm just thinking, Biafra is in the east of Nigeria. And the sun rises from the east so we're the land of the rising sun that's why the sun is on the flag.” (Interview 17)

This respondent spoke to the significance of the golden rising sun of the Biafran flag with no mention of the Pan-Africanist inspiration of the tri-color horizontal red, green, and black.

MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS

During the researcher's visit to the National War Museum in Umuahia, Abia State, the researcher observed and collected images of memorabilia pertaining to the Biafran secession and war. The researcher accompanied by a tour guide visited the modern-traditional warfare exhibit, the “Voice of Biafra Radio” bunker/civil war exhibit, and the open-air exhibit. The researcher also received a copy of the *National War Museum Umuahia* book which explains the purpose of the museum, provides information about each exhibit within the museum, and notes from the museum's curators, researchers, and various government officials.

Upon entry to the museum, the researcher noticed a marble plaque affixed to the external wall of the museum describing the dedication, and purpose for the museum. The marble plaque reads “To the glory of our fatherland and for the purpose of preserving for posterity Nigerian war efforts through the ages” and ends with a statement in quotations which states “That they did not die in vain.” This plaque also specifies that the National War Museum was launched on January 15th, 1985 by Major-General Babatunde Idiagbon.

Figure 3

Image of marble plaque outside of National War Museum



The modern warfare exhibit included sketches and images of traditional and modern warfare weapons, as well as Nigerian warfare and technology. One framed description of Nigerian Warfare also gave an account of some of the reasons behind warfare within Nigeria’s pre-colonial and post-colonial history. The framed description states. “Wars are fought for a variety of reasons. They may arise because of the changing relations of numerous variables—territorial expansions, economic, religious, or politics.”. This exhibit essentially provided insight into the beginnings of Nigerian warfare.

Figure 4

Image of framed Nigerian Warfare and Technology description



The “Voice of Biafra Radio” Bunker is the underground section of the museum which during and prior to the war was utilized by Biafran leaders and journalists to broadcast information throughout the Biafran territory. This section of the museum has also been dedicated to memorabilia directly associated with the Biafran War. Prior to descending to the “Voice of Biafra” Bunker, the researcher made note of a cemented wall with a painted image of the former leader of Biafra (Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu) alongside the last Biafran flag captured during the war. This exhibit emphasized the legacy of the Biafran secession and highlighted the experiences of politicians, soldiers, and civilians during the war.

Figure 5

The last captured Biafran Flag and portrait of Chukwuemeka Ojukwu



Additionally, the “Voice of Biafra” Bunker/Civil War included images of Biafran soldiers training at the start of the Biafran war with minimal military equipment. The image displayed Biafran soldiers without uniforms, or typical military grade weapons such as guns or rifles. Instead, the soldiers were training for combat using sticks.

*Figure 6
Biafran Soldiers training with sticks*

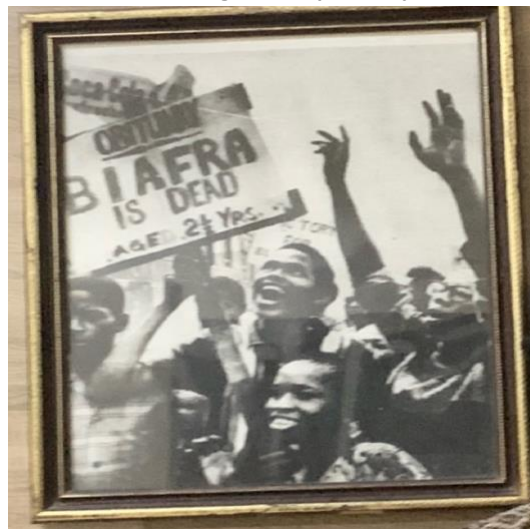


Figure 7
Biafran soldiers training with sticks in military formation



Further, this exhibit also included an image which depicted the ending of the Biafran war. The photo was captured during celebrations within the Biafran territory and displays an individual holding a placard which reads “Obituary: Biafra is Dead. Age: 2 ½ years”.

Figure 8
Individuals celebrating the end of the Biafran war



The Open-Air exhibit located on the yard adjacent to the “Voice of Biafra” Bunker/Civil War exit displayed various war machines used by the Nigerian and Biafran military during the Biafran war. While many Nigerian tanks, aircrafts, and ships were locally crafted or imported by its supporting countries (such as France, Germany, Italy, Britain,

and Egypt), all but one war machine used by Biafra were indigenously designed and crafted by the Biafran Research and Production Unit. A total 8 types of Biafran armored cars – also known as Red Devils– were designed and continuously innovated by Biafran engineers and chemists. This exhibit emphasized the ingenuity and innovation that emerged during the Biafran war.

Figure 9
Red Devil types A1, A2, and A3



The Biafran military also developed an Air force with various aircrafts. The National War Museum was only able to recover parts of one aircraft known by Biafrans as the “Biafra Baby” or the MFI-9B small bomber aircraft due to its small size. This aircraft was not indigenously produced, but it was provided by a Swedish mercenary pilot and innovated to carry six missiles by the Biafran Research and Production Unit.

Figure 10
Partial display of a Biafran Baby Aircraft



During the researcher's visit to the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra, (also known as Ojukwu's Bunker) the researcher also collected images of memorabilia pertaining to the Biafran secession and its subsequent war. A framed explanation of the purpose of preserving the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra states "In essence, this exhibition is meant to promote a non-conflict society devoid of tribulations, rancor, and disharmony." The entryway to the underground bunker displays an exposition of the architects, structural designers responsible for its construction as well as the furnishings and floor plan within the bunker. This historic site also emphasized the ingenuity that emerged during the war while also inviting individuals to aspire to a non-conflict society.

Figure 11
Framed explanation of Ojukwu's Bunker

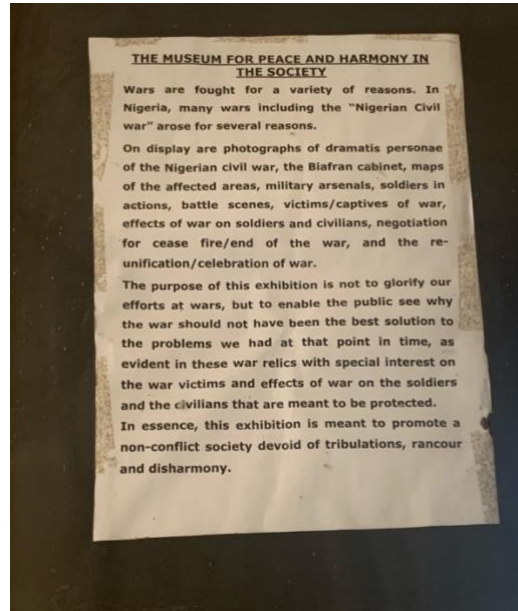
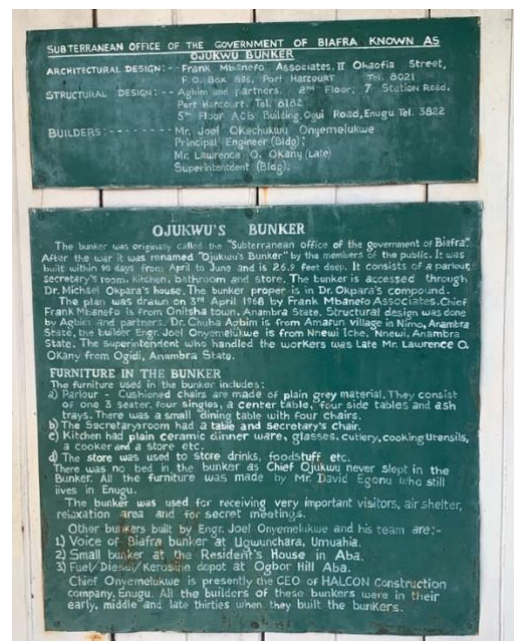


Figure 12
Description of Ojukwu's Bunker's designers, builders, and furnishings



Current Biafran Discourse

Interview participants claimed that conversations pertaining to the current Biafran secessionist movement have been continuous and widespread especially following the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu. By understanding the depth to which Igbo people in Southeast Nigeria discussed Biafra today, one can also gain insight into the ways that the 1967 Biafran secessionist movement have informed current conversations about and iterations of the movement.

THE ARREST OF CHIWETALU AGU

Interviewees were asked to provide their reactions to the arrest of Nollywood actor Chiwetelu Agu. 19 out of 20 respondents were aware of the incident with most all of them claiming they were made aware of the incident through social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Clubhouse. One 42-year-old respondent described the incident in detail stating the following:

“I heard the story that Chiwetelu Agu was arrested. He's an actor anyway– but he was putting on the regalia– Biafran regalia with cap, moving along the road to show that he supports Biafra because he's an Igbo man. Then, the Army men arrested him. They asked him to come, he came. And they asked him to kneel. and asked him why is he putting on a Biafran uniform? He said he's a Biafran– he's a proud Biafran. So, before you could know it, they asked him to lie down flat on the floor and they gave him a different type of punishment and flogged him to the extent of taking him to the barracks, which I heard on social media. They detained him for a day before they could release him.” (Interview 16).

BIAFRA IN CONVERSATION

Participants were asked to estimate the number of times they've engaged in conversations pertaining to Biafra with peers or family members. Eighteen of the twenty participants stated that within the past year, they've spoken about Biafra almost daily. According to respondents, Biafra has been a lingering topic of discussion due to the arrest

of the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra Organization– Nnamdi Kanu. A 33-year-old interviewee stated the following:

“This year, it has been talk of town especially in this part of the country– especially during this Nnamdi Kanu court case.” (Interview 10).

While many other interlocutors claimed that conversations about Biafra were extraordinarily regular. A 40-year-old respondent states

“If you say daily– you’re even too far off. We are talking about every few minutes. Even this morning when I came here– they were having a community meeting, but it still had something to do with Biafra.” (Interview 19).

IPOB & NNAMDI KANU

All 20 participants claimed to know of the IPOB organization, and its leader Nnamdi Kanu and all 20 participants claimed to be in support of the organization’s mission and objectives despite the researcher not asking whether the participants supported them. Further, one participant disclosed that they were an active member of the IPOB organization while others spoke in detail about the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu and the variety of protests which have demanded the release of Nnamdi Kanu from prison. One 21-year-old respondent claimed that they began supporting the organization following the Monday protests:

“I heard lots of positive things. Like the Monday protests, that’s when I started liking IPOB because they are trying to protect their leader so they can protect our interests and make sure the movement goes on. I see them and it’s encouraging to know that Biafra could actually come” (Interview 13).

Self- Identity

Participants were asked to identify themselves based on the options given in order for the researcher to gain insight into whether participants identified with their current nationality and tribe, or whether they aspired to a new national identity. Responses from

participants were extremely varied ranging from a self-identification of Igbo, Biafran, and Nigerian. Many responses also expressed that these identities are not mutually exclusive and identified with more than one. Many respondents also spoke directly to the forthcoming of a potential Biafra in order for their Biafran identity to be solidified. A response from a 38-year-old respondent stated that her identity as an Igbo woman is true until Biafra becomes a country.

“I'm Igbo and Igbos are in Nigeria. They have not really given Biafra to us as a country so we're still under Nigeria.” (Interview 2)

One other participant stated that it is difficult to choose only one label because every option could be used to identify him contingent on the context. This participant states:

“Well, the label becomes a bit difficult to individualize among those labels, because I'm an Igbo and Igbo is a tribe in Nigeria, Nigeria. And Nigeria is a country in Africa. So, I identify with all of them.” (Interview 16).

As can be seen by the complex nature of these participants' responses, self-identification among these labels is complicated because the identities are connected to one another.

Potential Future of Biafra

Participants were finally asked whether they desired the creation of a novel Biafran republic. All participants responded affirmatively claiming that if Biafra were to be created that certain socio-economic conditions would not be prevalent. Some respondents also asserted that they desired a Biafran nation that would emerge in a peaceful manner instead of by war. Take, for instance the response from a 38-year-old Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) member. He stated:

“We pray for the forthcoming of the country. Because we believe that if we should have Biafra as a country, things will be easy.” (Interview 3)

One other respondent asserted:

“Yes. If it is a peaceful Biafran nation. A Biafran nation that comes via negotiation via roundtable talk via agreements Via understanding. That's the ideal. That could happen. Okay. But not a Biafra that will come via violence. We don't need violence again, we lost so much. But if a peaceful Biafran nation presents itself, why not? I would love to have that.

These responses succinctly portray the collective desire for a new Biafran republic but also illustrate the collective grief that lingers amongst people born in the subsequent years following the 1967 Biafran secession.

CHAPTER 4:

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Biafra of 1967 and Biafra Today

As stated previously, the Biafran civil war began in 1967 shortly after the January 15th, 1966, military coup d'état (Achebe p. 97, 2012). This coup was led by the Igbo military soldiers Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Emmanuel Ifeajuna who attempted to procure the presidential office (Ezeani p. 20, 2014). In their mutiny, Nzeogwu and Ifeajuna killed 22 people including the Prime Minister of Nigeria (Abubakar Tafawa Bello) and senior politicians Ahmadu Bello and Samuel Ladoke Akintola (Ezeani p.20, 2014). Nzeogwu and Ifeajuna claim that the coup was intended to target the current political regime as a result of their corrupt governing practices. Despite their reasoning, the public perception of this military coup framed the attack by the Igbo military soldiers to be rooted in tribalistic animosity against the predominantly Hausa-Fulani political regime (Ezeani p.23, 2014). Considering that the Nigerian public perceived the coup to be rooted in an anti-Hausa-Fulani agenda, many Hausa-Fulani people of northern Nigeria responded with violence.

The coup d'état resulted in the immediate murder of over 200 Igbo individuals and the massacre of approximately 30,000 Igbo civilians by May of 1966 (Achebe, p.65, 2012). These murders and massacres manifested as sporadic pogroms across Nigeria which targeted Igbo people as a means of holding them accountable for the violence of the January 1966 military coup. Consequently, Igbo people began to flee back to their homes in the southeastern region of the country in order to escape possible death (Achebe p.67, 2012). As Igbo people returned to their homes, calls and demands from Igbo people were directed to the Nigerian government to end the violent genocide of Igbo people.

With this, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu emerged as an apparent savior for the Igbo people of the southeast, offering the prospect of secession as a remedy to the eminent violence looming over the southeastern region of Nigeria. Essentially, some scholars have attributed the desire for secession from Chukwuemeka Ojukwu to the claims of genocide from Igbo people (Heerten & Moses p. 170, 2014). More specifically, many scholars claim that Ojukwu's support for the Biafran secession was directly attributed to their propagandic organizing tactics. These tactics included the creation of the *Voice of Biafra* radio, and various pro-Biafra publications such as *Biafra Newsletter*, and "*The Case for Biafra*". These publications centralized the necessity for secession as a survival mechanism by reporting on various attacks occurring in the northern part of the region (Anthony 210, p.6). Take, for instance, headlines such as "The genocide of Easterners by the combined action of Northern soldiers, Local Government Police and civilians which has been going on for the last four months in the North and other parts of the country is the latest and most savage attack yet unleashed."—these headlines operated as mobilizing tools with the intention of emboldening the southeastern region to desire a secessionist republic (Biafra Newsletter). Essentially, the use of

language such as “genocide”, “pogroms”, and “massacres” circulated the media and further instilled a sense of Biafran nationalism throughout the year leading up the Biafran war.

These pro-Biafran organizing strategies persist and linger today as the IPOB organization continue to agitate for a novel secessionist Biafran state. Contemporary iterations of these mobilizing tools manifest as the novel *Radio Biafra* which operates in a similar fashion as the 1967 *Voice of Biafra* radio. *Radio Biafra* is operated by the IPOB organization and hosted by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (*Radio Biafra*). Broadcasts typically run for one hour and are updated weekly with pro-Biafran propaganda to mobilize individual citizens. According to a response from an interview participant “Nnamdi Kanu has become popular because he’s championing the new Biafran cause. His method-he’s speaking the minds of the people” (Interview 17). This participant is speaking directly to the organizing strategies which make up the contemporary Biafran secessionist movement. Furthermore, the *Radio Biafra* broadcasts are archived and accessible through the *Radio Biafra* website which also publishes newsletters and articles from a Biafran nationalist perspective (*Radio Biafra*). Despite the differing socio-political context, this organizing strategy mirrors the Biafran secessionist movement of 1967 wherein which propagandist articles were disseminated to mobilize individuals within southeastern Nigeria to seek secession.

Additional mobilizing strategies have emerged in the contemporary Biafran secessionist era. Take, for instance, the weekly Monday “Stay-at-Home” protests which began in response to the arrest and extradition of the IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. As stated previously, Kanu was arrested and extradited to Nigeria on June 27th to face trial for 11 felony charges. In response, people across the Southeastern region of Nigeria do not go to work or school; businesses close; and markets refuse to open for the entirety of every Monday—every week—until Kanu is released from federal detention (Busari & Princewill, 2021). When

interviewees were asked to describe what they knew about the IPOB organization and its leader Nnamdi Kanu, all respondents expressed their support for the organization's mission and its leader, but also expressed concerns regarding the long-lasting impacts of the protests. A 42-year-old respondent explicitly described the extent to which the "Stay-At-Home" Monday protests were in effect, stating, "Look at the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu causing a lot of problems here. Every Monday all the Biafran region are closing, locking up their shops every Monday. Even banks are not working." (Interview 18). Similarly, a 49-year-old physician communicated support for the organizational mission of IPOB but expressed dismay for the impacts of the Monday protests. He states,

"The hospital will not function on a 'sit-at-home' day. Because every staff member will not be at the hospital. Some will be. And then, some will be forced to sleepover on Sunday night and stay till Tuesday. [...] But not everybody can do that and not everybody can access medical care from their homes, so people could die. And you must remember that a majority of people live on a day-to-day basis. They earn their living today, and feed on what they earned that day. So, now that we sit at home on Monday, money is not being made on Monday. " (Interview 17).

Essentially, this respondent is articulating the urgency amongst people who support the IPOB organization. People within the southeastern part of the country are willing to risk their income to support the mission of the IPOB. Despite the direct negative economic impact on the lives of people in the Southeast, these protests are viewed as being well-intentioned and speak to persistent desires for a Biafran nation today.

Equally important, when interview participants were asked whether they desired a secessionist Biafran state— not only did all participants respond affirmatively—but their individual motivations were almost indistinguishable. Each respondent alluded to the socio-economic conditions within Nigeria today and a desire for economic and political freedom. Terms such as "freedom" and "economic marginalization" appeared in 18 out of the 20 interviews and 10 out of these 18 participants explicitly cite Mazi Nnamdi Kanu or *Radio Biafra*

as their source of information. One 33-year-old Igbo woman elaborated on why she desires a Biafran secession and explicitly cited Kanu and his *Radio Biafra* stating

“We are fighting for our freedom. But, actually, in other news [outlets] they will tell you that that’s not our aim. The news will say ‘Maybe they have their own personal interests for wanting [Biafra]’. But we, the general public, believe we are fighting for our freedom. And maybe the Biafran Radio—if you listen to it, you’ll see that it’s from there that we are convinced that we and the IPOB are fighting for freedom” (Interview 20).

This participant explicitly stated that her secessionist stance and reasoning has been informed from the *Radio Biafra* broadcasts by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Her desire for a secessionist Biafran state is rooted in a pursuit of freedom despite narratives from mass media and news outlets that depict the contemporary desires for Biafra as futile personal interests. In this context, “freedom” could be understood to be synonymous with liberation from a form of subjugation.

Personal, National, & International Perceptions of Biafra

Interview participants were not old enough to have experienced the war therefore their personal accounts and perception of the Biafran secession and its subsequent war consisted of information they learned in school and stories they’ve heard from family members that experienced the secession. On the other hand, interview participant’s perspectives of the current Biafran movement have been informed by their own personal experiences and interactions with media, protests, or information pertaining to the contemporary Biafran movement and the IPOB organization.

National narratives and perceptions have depicted the Biafran secession and war of 1967 in various ways. Take, for example, the stance of Nigeria regarding the Biafran secession and its subsequent war as presented in the government funded National War Museum and Historically preserved Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra. The preserved memorabilia and relics within the National war Museum were presented within 3 exhibits—

modern-traditional warfare exhibit, the “Voice of Biafra Radio” bunker/civil war exhibit, and the open-air exhibit. The modern-traditional warfare exhibit primarily showcased the history of warfare in the African continent with great attention to Great Britain’s impact on the creation and development of Nigeria’s armed forces. The “Voice of Biafra Radio” bunker/civil war exhibit showcased materials pertaining to the Biafran civil war. This exhibit primarily displayed relics such as the original “Voice of Biafra” radio transmitter, the Biafran coat of arms, portraits of Nigerian politicians and military leaders who were killed during the military coup leading up to the Biafran secession and war, and other important casualties from Biafran leadership and Nigerian leadership. Clippings of newspaper publications and photos depicting various protests amongst anti-war civilians were also displayed throughout the exhibit. For example, the photo in figure 8 depicts individuals holding a placard which reads “Obituary: Biafra is Dead. Age: 2 ½ years”– meaning that during the war, individuals perceived the war to be inherently negative and perceived the end of the Biafran secessionist state as worth celebration. The Open-Air Exhibit contained some examples of hardware and weapons used by the Biafran and Nigerian armed forces during the war. The hardware and weapons which belonged to the Biafran armed forces were indigenously made by the Biafran Research and Production Unit using local materials such as steel iron sheets and coil springs. The Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra (also known as Ojukwu’s Bunker) consisted of a ground level gallery exhibit with framed plaques and photos coupled with an underground office and bunker that once belonged to the 1967 leader of Biafra– Ojukwu. The ground level gallery exhibit included plaques such as the one shown in figure 11 while the entrance to the underground bunker displayed an informational plaque (shown in figure 12) detailing its architects, and structural designers– all of which were also members of the Biafran Research and Production Unit.

Essentially, both the National War Museum and the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra and their tour guides maintained neutral positions regarding the motives behind the Biafran secession and its subsequent war. Neither historic site explicitly addressed how the prospects of a new Biafran nation motivated war efforts or the political philosophies which informed the Biafran secessionist movement. In fact, the, national narrative as presented by these federally funded historic sites primarily emphasized the ingenuity and innovation that emerged among Biafrans in response to Nigeria's declaration of war against the former Federal republic of Biafra. Similarly, both historic sites maintained an anti-war atmosphere evident through the various expositions on plaques throughout the galleries. The most compelling evidence to demonstrate this narrative of ingenuity, innovation, and admonishment for war violence is a remark from the National War Museum tour guide wherein which he stated, "We are not promoting war– we are promoting the resilience and genius of Igbo people" (Tour guide). In this quote, the National War Museum tour guide explicitly states that his detailed examinations of the various Biafran indigenously made tanks and fighter jets, are intended to draw attention to the collective war effort amongst Igbo engineers, and chemists and commemorate their labor and inventiveness. Additionally, a plaque within the ground level gallery exhibits prior to entering the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra stated the following:

"The purpose of this exhibition is not to glorify our efforts at wars, but to enable the public the to see why the war should not have been the best solution to the problems we had at that point in time, as evident in these war relics with special interests on the war victims and the effects of war on the soldiers and civilians that are meant to be protected. In essence, this exhibition is meant to promote a non-conflict society devoid of tribulations, rancour, and disharmony." (Figure 9).

This quote plainly states the purpose and intentions behind the federally funded historic site and therefore speaks to a contemporary national narrative which prioritizes the memory of the violence of the war while encouraging a peaceful society devoid of the horrors of war.

In the contemporary Biafran context, the Nigerian federal government has tagged the IPOB organization a terrorist group while also charging its leader with over 11 felony counts associated with terrorism (Busari & Princewill 2021). As of 2020, the United States and European Union have begun the process of designating the IPOB organization a “separatist militant terrorist group” (Department of Justice, 2020). In other words, both national and international perceptions of the modern Biafran movement categorize the mission of the IPOB negatively. When interview participants were asked to provide their personal assessments of the IPOB organization and Kanu, all participants appeared to be in support of their organizational mission and disagreed with claims that the organization is a terrorist group. One IPOB organizational member explicitly stated the following:

“IPOB as a group...they were tagged a terrorist group. But here, and now, I'll tell you that we are not a terrorist group. We are freedom fighters. We don't carry ammunition. What we deal with are placards. But as of recently, the Nigerian police force and the Nigerian military force— they've started killing IPOB members at peaceful protests.”
(Interview 3)

This IPOB member conveys a disavowal of the national perception of his organization and establishes that the practices of the IPOB are completely peaceful. Further, the respondent confronts the state sanctioned violence enacted on IPOB members when they choose to peacefully assemble. Similarly, one respondent denounces claims that Kanu is a terrorist leader and attests to the validity of Kanu's views and agitations by linking Kanu's contemporary Biafran agitation to Ojukwu's agitation for Biafra in 1967 and Nnamdi Azikiwe's anti-colonial struggle. Interviewee 4 stated,

“You have to agitate. You have to fight. You have to show that what you agitate for is indeed yours. It is your right. This agitation isn't just coming from Nnamdi Kanu though, but it started with ‘Zik [Nnamdi Azikiwe] against the British and Ojukwu for Biafra. Ojukwu fought for it- there was the war [...] and people have been rising to fight for [Biafra], rising to agitate for their rights but today, Nnamdi Kanu has come to ensure that [Biafra] would actualize.

Now he became the enemy of the country because he's fighting for what belongs to him and he's not fighting for it alone. Because you see, it is not solely what belongs to

him but what belongs to us—the Biafran people and everyone in the eastern region. He's doing what he's doing for everybody. He came out and now the [the Nigerian government] sees his face and his voice so they are after him. Because it now seems like he's the only one fighting for our rights but he's not.

I honestly think what he is doing is right. Somebody like me, when my father died there were certain things that were supposed to be given to me but [my family] wasn't forthcoming so I had to fight for it. After some years of agitation, I got it and that's what I believe Nnamdi Kanu is doing. Our governance, our noble men, famous men, or people whose voices are heard nationally-globally, they should offer him and IPOB support for this Biafran agitation.” (Interview 4).

This participant expressed his support for Kanu in detail and even connected his own personal struggle with family members to the methods of Kanu—further displaying an intimate connection to the championed cause of Kanu and the IPOB. He also claims that the Nigerian government has only targeted him because he's become a figurehead for the contemporary Biafran movement.

On October 8th, 2021, the famous Nollywood actor and philanthropist Chiwetelu Agu was arrested, and detained in Onitsha, Anambra state by the Nigerian Army for wearing a shirt displaying the Biafran flag (BBC Pidgin, 2021). This incident further illustrates the seemingly negative and criminalizing national perception of the contemporary Biafran movement specifically amongst army officials which represent the Nigerian government. The consensus amongst Igbo people in the Southeast appears to be a disavowal for Agu's arrest. Many interview respondents claimed that the arrest of Agu was not only an expression of Nigeria's anti-Biafran stance, but it also revealed a pattern of Nigeria's human rights violations. Namely, one respondent stated

“Yes, I am familiar with the Chiwetelu Agu issue. Actually, that shows something very significant— that Nigeria doesn't practice what's called ‘fundamental human rights. As a nation— fundamental human rights are an entitlement to every person. People should be entitled to their opinion and their expression. Nobody should feel like they're under a bondage or under duress. So [Agu] put on clothes with the Biafran flag—which I believe other people have done. This is not the first time someone has worn something with a flag on it. But he was arrested, and he was later released at the end of the day. But the promise of arrest means you are deprived of that fundamental human

right, which everyone is supposed to enjoy. Everybody is entitled to enjoy the fundamental right (Interview 19).

This respondent asserts that Agu should not have been arrested for the act of wearing a garment, and further, that Nigerian residents are not at liberty to fully express themselves or their opinions without the threat of arrest. Also, this respondent highlights that the Biafran flag should, ideally, be perceived by officers as any other flag—yet it is not. Similarly, another interviewee proclaimed that Agu’s arrest is merely an example of many other instances in Nigeria where people have been punished for expressing their opinions. This participant states “For him to be arrested, is the ultimate extreme— and being beaten, is a whole other story. So, it tells you a whole lot about what goes on in Nigeria, people are not allowed to express their opinions” (Interview 17). As can be seen, public perceptions amongst Igbo residents regarding Agu’s arrest conflict with the criminalizing actions by the Nigerian Army.

The current perception of the Biafran secession by the Nigerian government also memorializes Biafran secessionist agitations as an initiative of the past, rendering current Biafran agitations from the IPOB organization invisible. This is evident as the Nigerian government has criminalized current secessionist efforts and disregarded public discourse pertaining to the Biafran secession. As stated previously, the IPOB organization has been agitating for the secession of Biafra since 2012, and support for their organizational mission has grown in response to the leader’s arrest (Busari & Princewill, 2021). Accordingly, all respondents either currently self-identify as Biafran or hope to identify as Biafran when Biafra is an established country. One respondent stated “I’m an Igbo woman, I’m from Nigeria. But Nigeria— I don’t so much like Nigeria because we are being oppressed. So that’s why we’ve been arguing and struggling for Biafra to be on its own and to be free from Nigeria. And when Biafra comes, I will be a Biafran woman.” (Interview 10). Similarly, another respondent firmly identified as a Biafran and described the country of Biafra saying, “My family is

practically the head of Biafra [...] If I'm left to say, Biafra as a country is a sweet home, a Blessed land and I must say that every living thing that comes from that country– today is blessed.” (Interview 3). Further, 18 of the 20 interview respondents stated that they had conversations pertaining to Biafra daily, with one participant stating “This [Biafra] issue is worldwide– its viral. You’ll hear people talking about it daily– while they’re walking or traveling and anywhere people gather– you’ll hear about it (Interview 8). Considering this, the current perception from the National government also fails to consider the contemporary Biafran movement as an omnipresent collective memory and a development inspired by the Biafran secessionist efforts of 1967.

According to respondents, the collective memory of the 1967 Biafran secession and its subsequent war is one riddled with pain and loss, evident only through accounts provided by family members who survived the war. All 20 participants stated that they did not receive in-depth school instruction pertaining to the Biafran war, therefore constraining collective memories of the 1967 Biafran movement to the orature and personal testimonies of surviving family members. An interviewee expressed that the 1967 Biafran war has been immortalized in the lineage of all Igbo people in Nigeria stating

“The stories were discussed extensively and its very emotional each time they discuss because the story goes this way–over 3 million Biafrans died during the Civil War, or what I would call a form of genocide. So, it’s a very emotional story. I think every family in Biafran land, lost someone during the war. There's no family that did not lose someone– so it was a major setback to a people, and to an entire tribe (Interview 17).

In other words, the number of casualties during the war have had ripple effects on every Igbo family in Nigeria, therefore causing individual connections to the Biafran movement regardless of one’s stance on the issue. This participant continued by stating that the large number of casualties amongst Igbo people during the war has further impacted the lack of development in the region. He stated,

“Nigeria at that time began to develop educationally. University of Ibadan was established in 1948. And Igbos are very adventurous so most of the earlier graduates from University of Ibadan, were Biafrans. These are the people that were drafted in the Biafran army, so we lost an entire generation of potential elites and academics. People died from hunger, famine, and assault during the war, so it was a really emotional story... It really affected us, it affected our development as a region and it affected economic activities in the region.” (Interview 17).

Essentially, the collective memory of the 1967 Biafran movement is one associated with the loss of family members and the pain of rebuilding after the war.

Thinking Beyond Ethnic Conflict and Colonial Impositions

European colonization in Africa consisted of dividing African territories amongst European colonial rulers in order to distinguish and distribute territories amongst colonial rulers (Ayele 2015). In doing this, European colonial rulers were not only haphazardly dividing people and land into obscure groupings, but they were also negating the validity of pre-colonial divisions across the continent. In the case of Nigeria, British colonial rulers annexed and maintained control of Lagos from 1861 through 1960, when Nigeria was granted its independence (Ayele, 2015). In the years following the 1885 Berlin Conference, British colonial rulers were given control of a Northern Protectorate and a Southern Protectorate beginning in 1900 through 1914 when both protectorates were amalgamated to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria (Ayele 2015). The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria functioned as one colonial territory under Britain’s indirect rule (Ayele 2015). This meant that British colonial rulers relied upon local traditional leaders to function as intermediaries for British colonial policies while pre-colonial governing institutions were used to maintain the façade that these institutions functioned in favor of native populations (Ezeani p.86, 2014)

Many historians state that the success of British indirect rule lied in its use of local African rulers to implement colonial policies (Okpara & Olawoye p. 18, 2001). African leaders were often paid a small sum of money for their assistance to the British colony, but these

transactional relationships slowly became the pre-text for the corrupt, clientelist governing structures in Nigeria today (Ayele 2015; Okpara & Olawoye p. 19, 2001). Additionally, as anti-colonial resistance became commonplace under colonial rule, British colonizers adopted a divide-and-rule policy (Laumann, 2012). This policy resulted in the creation and categorization of Nigerian tribes and ethnic groups therefore, allowing the British to keep Nigerian groups separate from one another as much as possible (Wimmer p. 975, 2008). Categorizing and separating these groups from each other was only the beginning—once these tribes were established, British colonial rulers utilized this strategy to administer a tribal minority consciousness by rewarding the “majority” tribe with more opportunities to be in political office, higher rates of pay, and increased levels of development in “majority” regions (Oduntan p.19, 2019). In Nigeria, the Northern Hausa-Fulani region was constructed to be the dominating “majority” ethnic group followed by the Western Yoruba region, the Eastern Igbo Region, and smaller ethnic groups such as the Efik, Ijaw, Ibibio, Itsekiri, and over 250 others (Oduntan p.19, 2019; Yahaya, 2009). To reiterate, these tribal identities are not primal, innate, identities but rather, colonially constructed inventions that have been reinforced in the generations following colonial rule using school curriculums, history, and the development of languages.

The decolonization movement in Africa (understood as European colonizers granting nations their independence) led to lingering colonial structures within African countries such as constructed border, tribal categorizations, and the minority-majority consciousness among tribes (Oduntan p. 22, 2019; Ayele 2015). This narrative is oppositional to common perceptions which claim that the decolonization movement was an organic effort by African people to sustain their nations despite inherent tribal rivalries in the region. Regardless, the years following Nigeria’s independence were riddled with military coups, and counter coups in

the hopes of various tribes procuring power. Essentially, the power vacuum left by European colonizers coupled with the newly developed tribal majority-minority consciousness created the corrupt, clientelist, and tribalistic governing structures found in Nigeria today. Conflicts among colonially constructed “majority” and “minority” tribes also intensified in the years following independence— proving, Britain’s long-lasting impact on the people of the region.

Considering the origins of the “tribe”, it is imperative to note that the dominant narrative of the 1967 Biafran war invests in the colonial narrative of inevitable tribal conflict by claiming the Biafran secession and its subsequent war is merely another example of ethno-tribal conflict in the region. But an in-depth analysis of Ojukwu’s political ideology and the political context of the period reveal a nuanced explanation of the reasons for the 1967 Biafran secession and war. Ojukwu’s *Abiara Declaration* speech which was given 2 years into the Biafran war provides some context as to the motivating factors for the Biafran war by negating claims that attribute the war as such. He states,

“Our enemies and their foreign sponsors have deliberately sought by false and ill-motivated propaganda to becloud the real issues which caused and still determine the course and character of our struggle. They have sought in various ways to dismiss our struggle as a tribal conflict. They have attributed it to the mad adventurism of a fictitious power-seeking clique anxious to carve out an empire to rule, dominate and exploit” (Ojukwu 1969).

Essentially, Ojukwu distinctly negates propagandic claims which paint the Biafran war as both a tribal conflict and a power-seeking mission amongst Biafran leaders. He continues with an explanation for the Biafran secession stating,

“Our struggle is a total and vehement rejection of all those evils which blighted Nigeria, evils which were bound to lead to the disintegration of that ill-fated federation. Our struggle is not a mere resistance - that would be purely negative. It is a positive commitment to build a healthy, dynamic and progressive state, such as would be the pride of Black men the world over” (Ojukwu 1969).

Ojukwu asserts that the Biafran secession is a direct response to Nigeria's failure as a country by not only resisting the colonially constructed borders of Nigeria— but also reimagining a new healthy state.

The contemporary Biafran secessionist movement led by Kanu, has also emerged in response Nigeria's failures as a state, as can be seen in the responses from various interview participants. Essentially, all 20 interview respondents desire a new Biafran republic today, not because of ethnic conflict and imminent threats of violence from Northern tribes, but as a direct response to the socio-economic conditions present in Nigeria today. One interview participant elaborated on the socio-economic conditions of Nigeria today and their impacts on the contemporary Biafran movement stating,

“In general, really, these people want a real territorial Biafra. You cannot contain them; you cannot play with them. You know— all of these things thrive in a society, where there is inequality; in a society, where there is a high level of unemployment; a society where people are marginalized— where people cannot go to school not because they are not intelligent, but because they are financially handicapped. Scholarships are not available; funds are not available. People cannot earn a living because of the harsh economic environment. For instance, a young person who decides to go into tech startup in Nigeria, will find a lot of difficulty. This light you see here now, sometimes it won't last three or four hours a day. So, how does a young person find his bearing to go into a startup or make a living— it becomes difficult.” (Interview 17).

This participant clearly outlined the various degrees of Nigeria's failures as a society listing high rates of unemployment, financial hardship, lack of access to higher education, and even lack of reliable consistent electricity as some of the many reasons Igbo residents in Nigeria have been persistent in their agitation for Biafra. This participant also explained other motivational factors behind the current Biafran movement stating the following:

“Biafra is now a movement, whether we have real Biafra as a territory, or not, the Biafran mentality is a movement. It's a movement, because there are people east of Nigeria who are working very hard and who are bent on making a living on their own— who do not depend on governments. And these are very smart people.” (Interview 17).

In other words, this participant argues that today's Biafra may not result in a territorial secession but, the current agitation speaks to the collective desires for economic freedom, and social stability amongst people in Southeastern Nigeria. Similarly, a 25-year-old interview participant claimed that she desired the job opportunities that the secessionist state of Biafra may provide her. She states

“I believe if we had Biafra, there will be job opportunities for the youth. There will be better structures, and amenities for us. Because Nigeria as of today, we don't have that opportunity that [past generations] had in the past. But when Biafra comes, I think we'll have more privilege to do so many things that they've deprived us of, especially affordable schooling and job opportunities for the youth.” (Interview 9).

This participant asserts that the conditions of Nigeria today have not provided youth with opportunities for upward social mobility through jobs or affordable schooling. As can be seen, participants are invested in a future Biafran nation because of the declining societal conditions in Nigeria and participants are essentially seeking a way out of the economic and social hardship they have been experiencing in Nigeria.

Other respondents articulated prominent political events that have impacted the lives of people in the Southeastern region yet remain unaddressed by the Nigerian federal government. This respondent explained that an oil spill in the Niger Delta and Bayelsa region has uprooted agricultural opportunities and the lives of people living in the region. He explained,

“Look at Niger Delta or Bayelsa - you'll see nowhere to go. They can't farm because of the oil spillage. If you go to Bayelsa now— you'll find out that their land is spoiled because of oil spills, and they are suffering! Now, we are complaining to [the federal government] because we are the people that are generating this oil to possibly give us a positive economic outcome as a region. And we've been looking towards the government for money to clean up the oil or some type of assistance to be able to take care of our land and try to move on with life and all that, but the government is nowhere to be found.” (Interview 19)

Essentially, this respondent highlighted this incident as an example of Nigeria's failures to ensure the social welfare of people in the Southeastern region by providing monetary

assistance or assurance that the oil spill will be cleaned. This further illustrates the immediate desires for Biafra among Igbo people in Southeast Nigeria due to a demonstrated generalized feeling of lack.

Pan-Africanist Influences

In order to combat beliefs that the Biafran secessionist state and its subsequent war were results of ethnic conflict between the Northern Hausa-Fulani tribes and Southeastern Igbo tribe— we must consider the larger global context in which this war emerged. More Specifically, an examination of Black socio-political movements across the African diaspora from 1960-1970 reveal similar motivations as the Biafran secession of 1967.

Within the United States, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s ensured equal rights for Black Americans through the Civil Rights act of 1964 (National Archive 2021). This legislation was passed by Congress after decades of protest, boycotts, and grassroots organizing by prominent organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE) (African American National Archive 2021). After the legislative victories for Black Americans, conditions of violent racism persisted (through lynching, mass arrests, beatings, bombings and other forms of systematic inequalities). As a result, the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970's began to emphasize racial pride and self-defense while pushing for a global racial and economic revolution (African American National Archive 2021). Informed by tenets of Pan-Africanism— the Black power movement propagated radical thinkers and organizations that were no longer deeply invested in legislative victories but were instead critiquing different manifestations of white supremacy— such as colonization, imperialism, and economic exploitation. Prominent Black power thinkers and organizations include the infamous Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP), the Black Liberation Army, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and Kwame Ture.

On the African continent, the 1960s marked an era of decolonization, anti-colonial resistance, and for newly independent countries—political turmoil. Beginning with Ghana’s independence from Great Britain in 1957— 34 African countries (including Nigeria) gained their independence from European colonial rule between 1957 and 1970 (BBC, n.d). Ghana’s first African-born prime-minister—Kwame Nkrumah, maintained Pan-Africanist socialist beliefs and emphasized that the “New [decolonized] Africa” should be completely independent from European imperialism and organized continentally under the ideology of a “one United Africa” (Smith p.31, 1991). Similarly, Nigeria’s first African-born prime minister—Nnamdi Azikiwe, maintained Pan-Africanist beliefs and claimed that liberation of the African continent will require five primary principles (Idike 2000). These principles include spiritual balance (the display of empathy towards other’s views); social regeneration (unlearning all national, religious, tribal, and political-economic prejudice); economic determinism (establishing a self-sufficient economy free of imperialism); mental emancipation (becoming knowledgeable of African history and accomplishments to undo colonial narratives); and political resurgence (regaining a sense of African sovereignty) (Idike, 2000). Additionally, these prominent Pan-Africanist African thinkers were also heavily influenced by conversations with prominent leaders from the Civil Rights Era and Black Power Movement in the United States such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Stokely Carmichael— also known as Kwame Ture (King Encyclopedia n.d; Biney, p. 89, 2011). Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanist and nationalist thinking was significantly influenced by Azikiwe’s ideas as stated in his daily newspaper entitled “The African Morning Post” (Biney, p. 86, 2011). This information clearly illustrates an intricately interconnected struggle amongst Black Americans and African people which not only informed one another but also occurred within the same approximate decade).

With attention to Nigeria, the 1967 Biafran secession commenced in tandem with the Civil Rights movement of the 50s and 60s, the Black Power movement of the 60s and 70s, and the 1960s wave of African decolonization. Likewise, Ojukwu maintained a political philosophy informed by the prevailing sociopolitical ideologies of the period— those being Pan-Africanism, Black liberation, and socialist economic self-determination. His Pan-Africanist beliefs are notably evident in the composition of the Biafran flag. The Biafran flag is a horizontal tri color flag consisting of red, black, and green with golden rising sun in the center. The golden sun also has eleven rays which represent the eleven provinces in the former republic of Biafra (Ezeani p.25, 2014). The Pan-African flag, designed by the father of Pan-Africanism (Marcus Garvey) for his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) is strikingly similar, consisting of a horizontal tri color of red, black, and green. With the dissolution of the UNIA, the Pan-African flag and its colors have become widely recognizable symbols of Black liberation and the African diaspora (UNIAACL). Considering that the Biafran flag is a visual derivative of the Pan-African Flag, one can conclude that the intended political ideology of Biafra is also a derivative of Pan-Africanism.

Ojukwu's political ideology has been heavily informed by Igbo philosophy and his Western education, and is prevalent in Ojukwu's speeches, and rhetoric (Oha, p.73, 2000). More specifically, an examination of Ojukwu's *Abiara Declaration* speech reveals a clear articulation of Black nationalist, socialist, and Pan-Africanist vision. His *Abiara Declaration* speech was given on the 2-year anniversary of the start of the war to clearly articulate the principles of the "Biafran Revolution", to reflect upon the trajectory of the war and to motivate the Biafran armed forces (Ojukwu, 1969). Important to note, Ojukwu refers to the Biafran war using the language of "revolution" which is also common terminology used throughout the United States' Black Power Movement of the 60s and 70s. Additionally,

Ojukwu states “Our struggle, in an even more fundamental sense, is the culmination of the confrontation between Negro nationalism and white imperialism.” (Ojukwu 1969). In this, Ojukwu explicitly conveys that he and the secessionist state of Biafra maintain a Black nationalist perspective which parallels the common anti-imperialist Pan-Africanist beliefs amongst movement leaders of that era. Ojukwu remains in alignment with similar Black nationalist thinkers as he states, “Our struggle is a movement against racial prejudice, in particular against that tendency to regard the Black man as culturally, morally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically inferior to the other two major races of the world - the yellow and the white races.” (Ojukwu 1969). In this, Ojukwu suggests one of the primary motivating factors for the Biafran struggle is the prospect of ending global anti-Black racism.

Ojukwu demonstrates an anti-racist Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist vision for the former Biafran secessionist state, evident through rhetoric used in his *Abiara Declaration* speech, the composition of the Biafran flag, and given the context in which the Biafran struggle commenced. The 1950s through the 1970s marked an ecosystem of intensified political movements across the African diaspora—but most notably within the United States and the African continent. The 1967 Biafran revolution led by Ojukwu is merely an example of one of the various collective struggles against global anti-Black racism and White imperialism that emerged within this timeframe. In the contemporary context, the current Biafran movements led by Kanu and the IPOB organization do not emerge within a distinct ecosystem of intensified political movements but remnants of the Biafran revolution’s initial perspectives remain.

Evident through his *Radio Biafra* broadcasts, Kanu maintains an anti-colonial and anti-White imperialist stance by denouncing Britain’s involvement in creating the Nigerian Police force during the British colonial era. These critiques emerged in response to the END SARS

movement of 2020 which agitated for the abolition of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit within the Nigerian police force. The END SARS movement began because of rampant police brutality, profiling, and extortion of Nigerian residents in tandem with the Black Lives Matter and “Defund the Police” protests in the United States (M4BL 2020). In a *Radio Biafra* broadcast entitled “Britain Aiding and Abetting SARS” aired on October 16th 2020, Kanu began the broadcast with a prayer saying “Father, we know the plan you have for us and what we know is not in your plan is the continued existence of Nigeria [...] We pray for your justice in this ongoing racist Britain imperialism happening right now in Nigeria [...] and [justice] for all those that are in support of this murderous police force ” (Kanu, 2020). In this prayer, Kanu makes clear that he does not support White imperialism and the lingering impacts of British colonialism in Nigeria, but it appears that Kanu also calls into question the validity of Nigeria’s colonial borders. Most of Kanu’s broadcasts include a similar anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-Nigerian sentiment which resonates with many Nigerian residents who support the current Biafran movement. Take, for instance, a *Radio Biafra* broadcast aired on September 23rd, 2020, entitled “Even Britain Knows the Breakup of Nigeria is Inevitable” wherein he poses the following questions to listeners “If Nigeria is 60 years old, what was your grandfather’s country of origin? What nationality did your ancestors belong to before the White people came?” (Kanu, 2020). These questions operate as anti-colonial critiques which scrutinize the widely accepted belief that Nigeria is a viable country. In doing this, Kanu invites listeners to think critically about their nationality and country of origin as colonial impositions.

Unlike Ojukwu, Kanu does not explicitly proclaim a traditional Black nationalist or Pan-Africanist political ideology, despite inheriting the Pan-Africanist ideological legacy of Biafra. Instead, Nnamdi Kanu’s IPOB covertly integrates aspects of a Pan-Africanist vision in their demands to rethink the colonially imposed borders of Nigeria. By drawing the attention

of Nigerian residents to their constructed borders, individuals are afforded an opportunity to imagine their deconstruction. Similarly, Kanu's choice of language— notably terms such as “revolution” and “freedom”— allude to the legacy of Biafra as a revolutionary struggle while also providing listeners the sense of empowerment needed to dismantle Nigeria's colonial past and summon a novel African society such as Biafra.

Pan-Africanism as a Tool to Re-envision African Societies

Tommie Shelby's “Two Conceptions of Black Nationalism” explains Black Nationalism as taking effect in one of two formats: the first being Classical nationalism and the second, Pragmatic nationalism (Shelby p.666, 2003). Classical Black nationalism describes a nationalist stance rooted solely and primarily in the collective identity, interests, and consciousness of Black people, thereby creating the necessity for an independent self-determined Black state (Shelby p. 667, 2003). Pragmatic Black nationalism describes a nationalist agenda that emerges out of the necessity for creating greater socioeconomic conditions for Black people (Shelby p.667, 2003). While classical Black nationalism is situated within the pretense that Black people share collective interests, pragmatic Black nationalism intends to utilize nationalism as means of achieving a better quality of life and urgently respond to conditions in the present (Shelby p. 669, 2003). Considering that the 1967 Biafran revolution appeared to emerge in direct response to claims of state-sanctioned genocide against Igbo people, while the current Biafran secessionist movement appears to have emerged in direct response to the inadequate socioeconomic conditions of Igbo people presently— it is evident that the Biafran movement could also be an example of pragmatic Black nationalism with Pan-African symbolism.

As stated previously, Bonnet defines Pan-Africanism as “the unification of Africa through the destruction of European colonialism” while Odamtten attributes political Pan-Africanism as the political activism, agitation, demonstration, and organization aimed at uplifting the

socioeconomic conditions of all Black people globally, and Dodoo and Donkoh assert that a “Pan-Africanist state” would be the result of Pan-Africanism in practice (2019; 2019; 2014). Considering these conceptions of Pan-Africanism, it is evident that Ojukwu’s Biafran revolution of 1967 and Kanu’s contemporary IPOB organization are both aimed at destroying remnants of European colonialism, through political agitation and organization. Further, Ojukwu’s Pan-Africanist vision is made explicit in his *Abiara Declaration* as he speaks specifically about the conditions of Black people across the world and the utility of a pragmatic Black nationalism. To demonstrate, Ojukwu’s *Abiara Declaration* states the following:

“Biafra will not betray the Black man. No matter the odds, we will fight with all our might until Black men everywhere can point with pride to this Republic, standing dignified and defiant, an example of African nationalism triumphant over its many and age-old enemies. We believe that God, humanity, and history are on our side, and that the Biafran Revolution is indestructible and eternal.” (Ojukwu 1969).

In other words, Ojukwu establishes that the Biafran secessionist state has been created for the interests of Black people and to, more importantly, create the ideal Pan-Africanist state for Black people across the diaspora to witness its success. This is extremely significant because scholars argue that many early Pan-African leaders such as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois imagined the culmination of Pan-Africanism to manifest as one large self-sustaining Pan-Africanist state (Dodoo and Donkoh p.154, 2014). Many neglect to consider the ways that Pan-Africanist outcomes (such as a self-sustaining Pan-Africanist state) require the dissolution of predetermined colonial borders, and national identities,

Various prevailing conceptions of Pan-Africanism define the term as an ideology, a framework, and an outcome that refers to the unification of the African diaspora but fails to conceptualize the term as a tool that can be used to build and create this unity. To many, the 1967 Biafran revolution appeared to contradict dominant understandings of Pan-Africanism as a unifying mission due to Ojukwu’s demand for secession. Similarly, Kanu’s contemporary calls for secession could easily be misconstrued as state fragmentation if one does not

reimagine Pan-Africanism as a tool to bring about the unification of the African diaspora. It is also important to realize that both the 1967 Biafran revolution and the contemporary Biafran secessionist movement possess far reaching implications within the African continent. One interview participant speaks directly to this point stating,

“Let's be upfront, Biafra was an example of what could happen if people from their own tribe created something for themselves. So, if were to have won, then it would spark similar movements everywhere within Africa. Because, you know, Nigeria is created for the interest of British people. So, they [Nigeria's allies during the Biafran war] actually fought to be sure that Biafra was not a reality.” (Interview 17).

In other words, the 1967 Biafran movement demonstrated a collective disavowal for colonially constructed borders and proved that African people possess the ability to reimagine their future. This participant also argues that allies of the Nigerian military force (namely Great Britain) aided Nigeria during the war to ensure that Biafra would not come to fruition, and that, further, other African countries and regions would not imitate the Biafran secessionist movement and disrupt the lingering colonial borders.

Today, various regions in Nigeria have begun to respond to the failures of the colonially constructed Nigerian state by establishing other secessionist movements. Three interview participants named the Oduduwa secessionist movement as an example of other regions in Nigeria which look to secede from the country (Interview 12; Interview 19; Interview 20). The Oduduwa secessionist movement has sparked interest among many Yoruba people in the Western part of the country and further demonstrates the impact of the Biafran revolution and current Biafran secessionist movement. The social media app Clubhouse has also become an organizing tool among Nigerians who desire the Oduduwa Republic, with approximately 3 drop-in audio groups a week which allow individuals to listen to members within the group and discuss amongst themselves. For this reason, Biafrans long standing impact is clear in the secessionist agitation of other groups.

To reiterate, Pan-Africanism should no longer be offered as merely an explanatory political ideology or an understanding of the interconnectedness of Black people across the diaspora— but instead, it must also encompass the process of reckoning with the current implications of Africa’s colonial past to build anew. As a result, agitations such as the Biafran revolution must no longer be examined through a secessionist and separatist framework but instead, it should be examined with attention to the intended pragmatic goal of self-sufficiency among Black people. Ojukwu clearly articulates this point in his *Abiara Declaration* stating,

“We in Biafra are convinced that the Black man can never come into his own until he is able to build modern states based on indigenous African ideologies, to enjoy true independence, to be able to make his mark in the arts and sciences and to engage in meaningful dialogue with the white man on a basis of equality. When he achieves this, he will have brought a new dimension into international affairs.”

In this, Ojukwu argues that Black people must become self-sustaining by constructing new African states that serve the interests of the people within them.

CONCLUSION

The memory of the 1967 Biafran revolution and the contemporary Biafran movement have both succumbed to dominant colonial narratives which frame these movements as merely tribal conflicts. These dominant colonial narratives are the same ones that proclaim that tribal consciousness is innate to African countries and therefore war, conflict, and clash amongst these tribes is inevitable. Assessing the Biafran war and current Biafran agitations as ethno-tribal conflicts conforms to the decade’s long investment in the tribal consciousness narrative that emerged out of the colonial era.

However, it would be a drastic oversimplification to claim that tribal consciousness has not exemplified itself in the intended demographic composition of the Federal Republic of Biafra. While Ojukwu maintained a Black nationalist, Pan-Africanist political ideology (which was common in the historical period) that informed the Biafran revolution; Kanu’s

political ideology for the current Biafran movement is not explicitly Pan-Africanist but is distinctly anti-colonial and anti-White imperialism.

As can be seen in Kanu's anti-colonial political ideology, African people have been attempting to reckon with their colonial past. Early Pan-Africanist political thinkers such as Nnamdi Azikiwe attempted to confront Nigeria's colonial past by unifying the country and simply moving forward; while on the other hand, Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist political thought opted for the unification of the entire African continent and the severance of any political relationships with Africa's colonial rulers. Despite these past efforts colonialism's implications are still seen today throughout Africa as many contemporary political rulers have chosen to simply move forward with governance without settling the consequences of the past. In essence, African countries have been attempting to establish political systems, economies, and effective governments atop an already unstable colonial foundation. This method of confronting the impacts of colonial rule has proven to be ineffective in Nigeria and has resulted in instances of socioeconomic decline as described by interview respondents.

Today, various groups within Nigeria have been attempting to reckon with the impacts of colonial rule by developing new African societies and models of African statehood as can be seen in agitations for the Oduduwa Republic. Surface level assessments of these various movements may declare these agitations to merely be iterations of further conflict amongst various regions of the country, but a nuanced contextual examination of these movements places them in alignment with a decolonial struggle. And in order for a Pan-Africanist vision to come to fruition, African countries must eradicate remnants of their colonial past. With this, future scholarly attention should magnify the various secessionist movements across Africa by placing them in a contemporary Pan-Africanist context that may not replicate the African

movements of the past but should still be respected as its own manifestation of the movement.

The Biafran secession of 1967 and the contemporary Biafran secessionist movement is not simply a tribal conflict, but rather it is an attempt by both Kanu and Ojukwu to implement pragmatic Black nationalist practices to escape the socioeconomic conditions of Nigeria today. Further, Kanu's Biafra radio displays a rejection of colonially constructed borders while interview responses suggest a similar rejection considering the explicit statements from respondents which describe the failures of the current Nigerian state. Contrastingly, Biafra has not been forgotten in Nigeria's official narrative but the memory of and interpretation of the legacy has been oversimplified. The National War Museum and the Subterranean Office of the Government of Biafra assert that the Biafran war was a negative aspect of Nigerian history but does not critically examine or mention the current Biafran secessionist movement. Amongst interview participants, their peers, and their families, the idea of Biafra is remembered and revered in tandem with conversations about the contemporary Biafran movement.

Equally important, the anticolonial rhetoric exemplified by Kanu and the Pan-Africanist vision of Ojukwu expand on self-deterministic ideologies even though individual participants may not be fully aware of these visions. The leadership of the past and present Biafran secessionist movement also emphasize a pragmatic Black nationalist political ideology which is in agreement with many participants' expressed desire and reasoning for a secessionist Biafran state.

Finally, Ghanaian politician, and contemporary Pan-Africanist thinker Samia Nkrumah states the following in a 2018 interview:

"We've been artificially divided into small states, the Famous Berlin Conference in 1884. So with colonialism, came our division into small unviable states, and the whole idea of independence—"

political independence, national liberation— was to gain independence and then unite as a continent, as a people. So that we can begin reorganizing our society to eradicate poverty and lack. That was the original plan. So, we must never delink, freedom or independence from unity. They actually go hand in hand because why should we forever accept the artificially drawn frontiers that were not drawn by our forefathers or mothers but our colonizers. So, to gain full sovereignty, I think we have to go all the way back and dismantle those colonial borders.”

The 1967 Biafran revolution and the current Biafran secessionist movement led by Kanu exemplified a desire for freedom following Nigeria’s independence from colonial rule by attempting to dismantle and rethink Nigeria’s colonial borders– (similar to the Nigerian Oduduwa secessionist movement).

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