
Biafra @ 50

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CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY
AND DEVELOPMENT

Biafra @ 50

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CHAPTER ONE

What nation for which literature? The contesting nationalisms of the novels of the Nigerian-Biafran war

by Nikolai Jeffs



The novel of the Nigerian-Biafran war records, and is also engaged in, conflict. The broadest ambitions of the novel of the Nigerian-Biafran war can be said to supplement and supplant propaganda, official historiographies, autobiographical accounts as well as preceding literary works with one definite literary volume of the war. As a corollary, it can also be claimed that the ideological motivation of the novel of the Nigerian-Biafran war is to intervene into debates regarding the nature of the nation and the nation-state, forms of their self-representation, and the ideology binding society and state together. In other words, the novel of the war cannot be considered without a consideration of the ideology of nationalism that underwrites it and that the novel, in turn, also interrogates.

Here, however, there is a problem and one that has not been adequately addressed by those critics who otherwise ascribe a nationalist motivation to postcolonial literature. Namely, what is the precise subject of this nationalism? What socio-economic formation is seen as ideal to it? How does the novel conceive of the relation between ethnic and national identity and the political structure arising out of this relation? What counter-nationalism does the novel articulate: one determined by capitalism, socialism or some other socio-

economic formation? One giving recognition to ethnic differences or one blind to them? What state organisation does such a counter-nationalism imply - a secessionist, federal, confederal or highly unitary and centralist one?

In the context of the Nigerian-Biafran war these are quite literally life or death questions. Consider how the literary critic Bruce King recounts his stay in Nigeria during the war: “Significantly, no one at the at the University of Lagos questioned, as they might have done at the time, whether Achebe, Ekwensi and Okigbo were Nigerian. The government’s ideology during the war said they were. The war was being fought to keep them Nigerians” (King, 1986: 53).

The writers in question, however, were in Biafra at the time. They were keen, to say the least, not to be Nigerians and were doing their best to survive the onslaughts of the Nigerian army and airforce that was otherwise trying to maintain these writers’ prescribed Nigerianess by shooting or bombing them. Thus, while we might ascribe a nationalist ideology to both the Nigerian and the Biafran side, the practical manifestation of each was mutually exclusive. This was one of the reasons as to why the war was being fought in the first place.

In addition, if both sides required nationalist mobilisation in order to be successful in their political aims, the novel, as a genre, initially could not rise to such demands. Biafra had an impressive array of Igbo novelists on its side, but the energy, materials, and motivation to write and publish novels were just not available to them in wartime. Consider the highly instructive example of Chinua Achebe who had otherwise placed the writer in general, the novelist in particular, at the vanguard of social change. After the war broke out on 6 July 1967 and Biafra became increasingly beleaguered, Achebe’s literary priorities undertook a drastic change. During the war writing novels was certainly not at the forefront of Achebe’s concerns. This is how Achebe explained the situation in 1969:

“I can write poetry - something short, intense, more in keeping with my mood. I can write essays, I can even lecture. All this is creating in the context of our struggle. At home I do a lot of writing, but not fiction,

something more concrete, more directly related to what's going on. What I'm saying is that there are forms of creativity which suit different moments." (Cited in Lindfors, 1997: 34)

Poetry, drama, and political writing are less intense and taxing forms than that of the novel. A poetry reading, a play, a public meeting or a radio broadcast can achieve more immediate effects, more successfully, on their audiences than a novel. Although the political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson famously cast the novel as the key literary genre in the narration of the nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), war can necessitate this function being passed over to other literary genres or to non-literary ones altogether.

Nonetheless, one novel did come out of Biafra during the war. But the absence of resources, however, meant that Victor Nwankwo's *The Road to Udimma* was first published in West Germany in 1969 rather than in Biafra. Equally revealing of the conditions of war, which meant that those loyal to the Biafran cause met the advances of the Nigerian army by gathering what they could and relocating deeper and deeper into their Igbo heartland, the original manuscript was lost. The Nigerian edition in English (1985) is thus a retranslation of the German edition (Nwankwo, 1985).

The Road to Udimma equates Biafra with its Igbo ethnic core. It does not probe the question of Biafra's ethnic minorities many of whom did not support Biafra's secession at all. At the same time, the novel not only points to war crimes committed by the Nigerian army and the indiscriminate aerial bombings of civilian targets but is also highly critical of corruption within Biafra and the way in which many Biafrans chose to escape dispossession and death by crossing over to Federal held territory. Nonetheless, *The Road to Udimma* is one of the very few novels of the war written by a Biafran to make a positive and completely unreserved case for Biafran independence within the same economic and political framework as was initially declared on 30 May 1967 by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. *The Road to Udimma* is a novel of nationalist secession.

At the opposite of the ideological spectrum is Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982). One of the ideological projects of the novel, which follows the example of Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975), is to write women into the core of novelistic and historiographic narratives on the war. In contrast to Nwapa's novel, where the story focuses around life in an Igbo village within Biafra, Emecheta is keen to narrate the experiences of people living in the Mid-Western region. Control of this area was established by Biafran army in August 1967 but lost to the Nigerian army on 20 September 1967, the same day that Radio Benin made its declaration of independence.

The Mid-Western region had a large Igbo population and the second ideological project of Emecheta's novel is to give greater attention to its population:

“Records and stories have shown that Ibuza, Asaba and other smaller places along that border area [with Biafra] suffered most; but we glossed over, not being what the media of the time called ‘the Igbo heartland’” (Emecheta 1994. vii).

The horizon within which Emecheta reconciles the diverse elements of her novel is such that it rejects both the Nigerian and Biafran leaderships of the time and makes the case for a more anti-neocolonial and united Nigeria. The protagonist of her novel, Debbie Ogedemgbe, is from the Itsekiri ethnic group, she is “neither Igbo nor Yoruba nor Hausa, but simply a Nigerian” (Emecheta 1994: viii). Emecheta is effectively arguing for a public sphere and political structure blind to ethnic difference and which should transcend this difference. In terms of nationalism, the implied argument is that one is a Nigerian first and a member of their ethnic group second.

Emecheta's account of the war has been challenged by Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* (1986) which is also set in the Mid-West region. Iyayi is keen to point out the negative effects of the Biafran incursion on the non-Igbo population of the region. *Heroes* also

concerns itself with the plight of the common soldier and stands in stark opposition to the somewhat self-aggrandising view from above presented in the autobiographies of Nigerian general Olusegun Obasanjo (*My Command*, 1980) and Biafran General Alexander Madiebo (*The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, 1980). Where *Heroes* departs from the economic reformism of *Destination Biafra* is that its own pan-Nigerian nationalism makes the case that the ethnic, economic and political contradictions that led to the war can only be resolved within the framework of a socialist Nigeria.

Like Emecheta's and Iyayi's novels, the protagonist of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) is a member of an ethnic minority. A soldier on both sides Mene embodies how minority aspirations were in fact instrumentalised by both Nigerian and Biafran authorities. In the name of a dispensation more attune to the minorities, Saro-Wiwa left Biafra and actively sided with Nigeria during the conflict. The way in which he characterised that motivation in his memoirs *On a Darkling Plane* (1989) questions Emecheta's estimation of the suffering of the Mid-West Igbos and is revealing of his disillusionment with post-war Nigeria. His experience offers a valid description of the political motivation of *Sozaboy*:

“Most Nigerian works on the war, both fictional and otherwise, have been produced by Ibos and have been concerned mainly with their suffering in the war. They have tended to support the argument so eloquently put before the world by biafran propaganda that the Ibos were and are the oppressed of Nigeria. My account shows this to be far from the truth; the world and posterity have to know that the real victims of the war were the Eastern minorities who were in a no-win situation. They are the oppressed in Nigeria.” (Saro-Wiwa, 1989:10)

Like Emecheta, Saro-Wiwa's assertion of victimhood necessitates caution. One should be extremely careful when trying to quantify whether one side is more oppressed,

or had more victims, than any other. The absolute victimhood of the minorities is relative to their population numbers and the demographics of the ethnic majorities. In this respect, no one can deny that the overwhelming victims of the war were Igbos. All those, however, who try to gain an ethical edge by using either relative or absolute numbers of the maimed and dead do a great disservice to all the victims of the war, regardless of their ethnicity, and hamper the cause of reconciliation. This is because individual victims are first collectivised - they are seen only in terms of their ethnic identity - allowing a hierarchy of victimhood to be established with some victims seen as 'more worthy' of mourning and remembrance than other victims.

While Saro-Wiwa is right in saying that the majority of the novels written on the war have been written by Igbos, most of these novels are not coextensive with Biafran propaganda. However, the predominant settings of the novel of the war have tended to be in the former Eastern region of Nigeria. This has not only led to the downplaying of locations, peoples, and events pertinent to the non-Igbo areas of Biafra but also of those in the former Western, and Northern regions. As we have seen, such downplaying prompts novelistic revision, a re-centring on otherwise marginalised subjects and settings. Kolo Omotoso's *The Combat* (1972) takes place exclusively in the Western region but allegorises the war in terms of duel between a Yoruba mechanic Ojo Dada and an Igbo taxi driver Chuku Debe. Omotoso draws attention to the subalterns on both sides of the war and maintains an equal distance towards the political projects of both the Biafran and Nigerian elites. The friendship which once characterised Dada and Debe's relationship signifies a desire for a Nigerian public sphere that is blind to ethnic difference.

Wole Soyinka weaves the action of his novel *Season of Anomy* (1973) around Yoruba protagonists and growing social unrest, massacres, and elite violent crackdowns. With this Soyinka re-centres consideration of the war to at least two crucial events that triggered it: the crisis in the Western region following the corrupt elections of 1965 - an event that hastened the January coup of 1966 - and the massacres of Igbos living in the Northern region in the aftermath of the July 1966 counter-coup.

Similar to Omotoso's novel, in depicting violent conflict between two civilians in time of nominal peace, *Season of Anomy* blurs the difference between war and peace. For Soyinka what separates war from peace is not the fact that suffering, violence, repression and death are experienced but the quantities in which these occur. From the point of the view of the individual victims discussions about quantity are meaningless. What such differences may do is to condemn war, but they also legitimise seemingly peaceful periods and the violence and dispossession these contain. The political ideals of *Season of Anomy* are contained in anarcho-communism, more specifically in the community of Aiyéro, the principles of which inspire the vision for a more equitable polity.

If we can consider the novel of the Nigerian-Biafran war as being an independent novelistic genre in itself, then we also have to note the various other sub-genres; the historical novel, the allegorical novel, the thriller, and, crucially with regard to the historiography of the war, the novel of peace. The novel of peace arises out of the novel of war but focuses on the post-war period to assert that individual and collective conflict, impoverishment, violent death, death through disease such as kwashiorkor or cholera, and physical and well as mental trauma did not disappear with the formal surrender of the Biafran army on 15 January 1970. It forces a reordering of the temporality of war: if war did not begin with the outbreak of conflict as Omotoso and Soyinka suggest, when did the war end if not with the formal surrender?

For some who experienced the conflict, its burdens were much easier to bare than the unknowns of the precarious post-war period. In this context, the title of Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* (1976) speaks for itself. Ekwensi's last novel published before the war, *Iska* (1966), argued for a hybrid Nigerianism as exemplified in its narrative of intra-national migration and the intermarriage between members of different ethnic groups. As suggested by its title, *Divided We Stand* (1980) reversed the ideology of *Iska* and maintained that ethnic groups should be discrete and separated from each other; that an independent Biafra was a desirable political project. In contrast, *Survive the Peace* accepts the principles of a united Nigeria but makes the

case that members of different ethnic groups should not intermarry. The protagonist of the novel, journalist James Odugo, experiences another defeat inasmuch as his estranged wife Juliette has a child with a Nigerian army officer. In other words, an ideal Nigeria should be the sum and not the transcendence of the ethnicities that comprise it. These ethnicities should be discrete and separate but equal according to Ekwensi. In the novel, Odugo is killed during a violent roadside robbery carried out by Igbo youth. While the village elders of Obodonta from where the robbers hail, turn these young men over to the federal authorities, the melancholy of *Survive the Peace* promotes an idealised view of wartime Biafra as a state existing without intra-ethnic, class and gender conflict.

Ekwensi's popular writing style has influenced many writers including Eddie Iroh who wrote a trilogy of thrillers about the war: *Forty-Eight Guns for the General* (1974), *Toads of War* (1979), and *The Siren in the Night* (1982). Both Ekwensi and Iroh were Igbos active in the Biafran struggle, but *The Siren in the Night* reveals important differences between them. Ben Udaja, the novel's protagonist, is a founder of the guerrilla formation the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters (BOFF). Nonetheless Udaja decides to cross over to the Federal side in the belief that this will hasten peace and bring an end to the suffering for all those left in Biafra. The end of the war thus sees Udaja as part of the Federal administration but also the target of the Nigerian secret service, an operative of which believes that Udaja is an undercover BOFF agent. But Udaja's loyalty to the post-war administration is authentic not feigned and he seeks to show this further by marrying a northerner. Although Udaja is eventually driven to a complete mental breakdown, Iroh's character, symbolically and optimistically, returns to the political aspirations of the pre-war novels of Ekwensi. An interethnic couple, and the future hybrid Nigerian it envisages, is a device in the novel's larger political vision of a Nigerian polity that should be blind to ethnic difference, rather than seeing ethnicity as the key with which to decipher the diverse actions of any given individual.

The interethnic couple is also deployed in Elechi Amadi's *Estrangement* (1986).

Importantly, the condition alluded to in the title is one of the post-war period. But Amadi, who, as a member of the Ikwerre ethnic minority, crossed over from Biafra to join the federal army, is not focused on relations between the Igbo and the ethnic minorities of Biafra. Rather reconciliation is signified by the union of the protagonist Alekiri, who hails from an ethnic minority within Biafra with Dansuku, a Muslim army officer from the North. In the symbolic temporality of *Estrangement* the war ends in 1976 for it is only then that Alekiri and her estranged husband Ibekwe make peace with each other and that Alekiri, who first entered a relationship with Dansuku during the war, accepts his offer of marriage.

In terms of readership reception, commercial success, and the number of languages it has been translated into, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is the most successful Nigerian-Biafran war novel to date. Unlike its literary predecessors, *Half of a Yellow Sun* provides a bibliography of the historical, autobiographical and novelistic sources that have influenced it. By undertaking this act, *Half of a Yellow Sun* implicitly posits itself as a consideration, as a transformation but also as a supersession of all the diverse sources that contributed to its making. *Half of a Yellow Sun* has come to signify the novel of the Nigerian-Biafran war and the suffering of the Igbo during its course. But, if the past is anything to go by it will perform a similar function to that performed by the predecessors to every subsequent novel on the war: it will trigger an intertextual novelistic response that will address the silences and obscurations and ideological projects inherent in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

No individual novel can capture the diversity of the individuals, ethnic groups, events, settings, and temporalities that the Nigerian-Biafra war cast its shadow over. In this respect, any individual novel is a poor instrument with which to narrate or imagine the multitude of voices and viewpoints that comprise a diverse nation-state like Nigeria. Attaining the whole picture of the war through an individual novel of the Nigerian-Biafran war is an impossible goal. A more realistic target is to continue the pursuit of a more balanced account of the war in literature by combining and recombining the diverse elements that comprise the fifty or more novels already written about the conflict.

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CHAPTER TWO

Analyzing Contemporary Press Coverage of the Indigenous People of Biafra's campaign for secession Introduction

Musibau Tunde Akanni, Ph.D and Ismail Adegboyega Ibraheem, Ph.D



For thirty months, between 1967 and 1970, members of the Igbo ethnic group, one of over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, fought against the Federal Government of Nigeria for secession. After the war, to reinforce unity among all the ethnic groups that comprise Nigeria, the Federal Government repeatedly asserted that the war had neither any victor nor any vanquished. That sentiment, though initially popular, appears to be losing its appeal. The Igbo people of the southeastern region of Nigeria gave the strongest expression of their reinvigorated nationalism after the 2015 general elections which saw the election of Muhammadu Buhari, a Hausa-Fulani northerner, as Nigeria's new president. Under President Jonathan's administration (2010-2015) the Biafra agitation had been intermittent and largely limited to areas in the eastern part of the country. However, since President Buhari assumed office, agitations have grown in prevalence and have been accompanied by violence, a feature manifesting extensively in the mass media.

This chapter examines the coverage of the renewed Biafran campaigns in three newspapers - Daily Trust, The Punch and The Sun Newspaper - with different regional affiliations: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo respectively. It seeks to assess whether the main principles of conflict-sensitive journalism, which stipulates that the media must be consciously supportive of mitigation of conflicts in both their reportage and analysis before, during and even after break out of conflicts, are being applied. This is imperative in the age of online media which accelerates unprecedented circulation of information materials.

According to Achebe (2012), the Nigeria-Biafra War was arguably the first fully mediated conflict in history. It was the first time pictures of blood, guts and severed limbs-from the war front flooded into homes around the world through television sets. Heerten and Moses (2014) also note that both sides depended heavily on the mass media and public relations to generate morale and appeal to international actors for support of their campaigns. The biases of the media manifesting justification and dissent since the war raged four decades ago appeared to have endured, even if channels have changed.

Reporting Conflict

The Nigerian press' coverage of conflicts had been largely bereft of the required specialised skills and knowledge (Akanni, 2017; Isola 2010). Akanni (2017) asserts that the Nigerian press coverage of oil-induced conflicts in particular betrays acute sensationalism and utter disregard for investigation and was unsupportive of meaningful resolution. Isola (2010) argues that conflict has come to be perceived by the newsroom as a normal and necessary element of the news. This is why stories with a conflict dimensions consistently hit the headlines across the print and the broadcast media.

Baumann and Siebert (2001) argue that the press has the capacity to impact conflict pre-emptively, restoratively and could even function as mediators. In contrast, Bratic, Ross and Kang-Graham (2008) argue that the media are more likely to perpetuate

violent conflicts than contribute to their peaceful resolution, recalling that news media have often been used to promote wars and conflicts. Examples of mass media, particularly radio, exacerbating conflict include war in Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide. In these instances the role of the local media in the promotion of violence was so dominant, they assert, that international western media, despite its global presence, was not able to affect the course of escalating conflicts. For Moorcraft and Taylor (2007:49) it is bad enough that:

“correspondents do not need military officers to censor them or bend them to their will. In nearly all wars, journalists will tend to take sides, despite their vocation mission and their training. In wars of national survival, they will instinctively veer towards patriotism. In wars of choice, if they are embedded, they will usually subconsciously bond with their hosts. If they are freewheeling in conflicts such as Bosnia or Rwanda or Darfur, and many other wars to come, they may well consciously indulge in advocacy”

Bratic et al (2008) further note that journalists are trained to construct news within a “story” or narrative form that employs an antagonist facing a protagonist, engaged in dramatic tension, within a plot with the predictable elements of “a beginning, middle and end”. This form determines news in the dominant cultural narratives and reinforces the idea of a just war against evil enemies while encouraging opponents to press for perceived advantages, however insignificant.

The wider political environment also play a pivotal role in the way the media report conflicts. It can explain the circumspect conduct of the opposition press in Nigeria between 1988-1999 (Olukotun, 2002). A critical press, having availed a section of the populace with the avenue to express their views, attracted government attacks. Copies of their publications were serially banned and editors and reporters were hounded, even killed. Here, Olukotun (2002) suggests a continuation of a tradition dating back to the colonial days, where the media positioned itself against the imperial hegemony.

Peace scholars (Lynch, 2008; Galtung, 1993) take exception to what they perceive as mass media's casual handling of conflicts. To them, much of what exists is war journalism. Peace journalism is distinct from war journalism, which they view as having systematically focused on violence and victors, ignoring the less visible effects and alternatives. Lynch (2008) describe war journalism as focusing on overt acts of violence and on the most prominent hardships that a nation faces. The tendency of war journalism is to await, and then follow violent tragedies, and to use classic bureaucratic, formal expressions to emphasize an external point of view. Peace journalism takes a very different approach (Lynch; 2008):

“[It] explores the backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation, presenting causes and options on every side (not just ‘both sides’); Gives voice to the views of all rival parties, from all levels; Offers creative ideas for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking and peacekeeping; Exposes lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides, and reveals excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, peoples of all parties; pays attention to peace stories and post-war developments.”

Peace journalism scholars believe that these values convey a call to duty from an informed, learned authority. It has been labelled as ‘analytical journalism’, ‘constructive journalism’ ‘reflective journalism’ and ‘solutions journalism’ (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). It is a typical ‘how-to’ thesis which readily finds favour among non governmental organizations who advocate the use of journalism to support the resolution of conflicts. The reformist drive commenced by the proponents of peace journalism has since been further enhanced and conceptualized into conflict-sensitive journalism. Howard (2004) presents a nine point checklist for those looking to report in a conflict sensitive way. These are:

1. Avoid reporting a conflict as consisting of two opposing sides. Find other affected interests and include their stories, opinions and goals. Interview merchants affected by the general strike, workers who are unable to work, refugees from the countryside who want an end to violence etc.
2. Avoid defining the conflict by always quoting the leaders who make familiar demands. Go beyond the elites. Report the words of ordinary people who may voice the opinions shared by many.
3. Avoid only reporting what divides the sides in conflict. Ask the opposing sides questions which may reveal common ground. Report on interests or goals which they may share.
4. Avoid always focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side. Treat all sides' suffering as equally newsworthy.
5. Avoid words like devastated, tragedy and terrorized to describe what has been done to one group. These kinds of words put the reporter on one side. Do not use them yourself. Only quote someone else who uses these words.
6. Avoid emotional and imprecise words. Assassination is the murder of a head of state and no-one else. Massacre is the deliberate killing of innocent, unarmed civilians. Soldiers and policemen are not massacred. Genocide means killing an entire people. Do not minimize suffering, but use strong language carefully.
7. Avoid words like terrorist, extremist or fanatic. These words take sides, make the other side seem impossible to negotiate with. Call people what they call themselves.
8. Avoid making an opinion into a fact. If someone claims something, state their name, so it is their opinion and not your fact.
9. Avoid waiting for leaders on one side to offer solutions. Explore peace ideas wherever they come from. Put these ideas to the leaders and report their response.

Media framing

Framing defines how a certain piece of media content is packaged so as to allow certain desirable interpretations and rule out others. Media frames can be created by the mass media or by specific political or social movements or organizations. As a theory of mass communication, framing remains one of the most widely researched and heavily focused concepts driving news media. Nearly all forms of political communication exhibit various aspects of issue framing, as do most news pieces on television, in newspapers, magazines, radio, and online. Framing theory presumes the prevalent media will focus attention on newsworthy events and place them within a sphere of meaning (Framing, 2004). Further, a framing effect is said to manifest when, in the course of describing an issue or event, a speaker's emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their own opinions (Druckman, 2001).

The first major conjecture of framing may be traced to Walter Lippman's seminal publication, "Public Opinion" (1922). As a newspaper columnist, Lippman was among the first to engage deeply with media's influence on public attitudes. He recalls how the world could imagine issues before accessing or experiencing them. But for education, those preconceptions which enable the people to have access to information in the first place dominate deeply the whole process of perception. Lippman's early thoughts on media persuasion set the foundation for future studies in both framing effects and agenda setting theory. Drawing from observations of possible media effects in news production, Tuchman (1978) formulated connections between media content and collective meaning. According to him, when journalists choose content and frame it, they are constructing a reality for their audiences. Tuchman's research in further developing framing theory related the framing of issues to second-level agenda setting as a more narrow, specific direction of media emphasis of certain aspects of news. Tuchman's theory is an appropriate lens for this paper given that the selected newspapers all reported the renewed agitation for Biafra but in different ways.

Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study to make clear the pattern of press coverage toward the renewed agitation for Biafra by the Nnamdi Kanu-led Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The qualitative approach was driven by the study's considerations which were anchored on the framing of the messages presented by article headlines in three newspapers that have historical basis in the three regions of the country Daily Trust (Northern), The Punch (Western) and The Sun (Eastern). The study was primarily guided by the communication theory of framing, in order to ascertain the pattern of reportage and analyses of the renewed agitation for the recognition of Biafra by IPOB. In this regard, editorial items including news reports, opinion articles, letters to the editor, as well as editorials, constituted independent units were analysed.

All the results, captured by an online search of the newspapers website of "IPOB" between March and June 2016, were examined. The researchers' resorted to the online materials because of the increasing challenge, of access to duly kept collection of newspapers, in this digital age, even at libraries run by newspaper houses. The search produced 18 results for Daily Trust, 36 results for The Punch and 64 for The Sun. The resultant media publications included those deriving from press statements, public pronouncements by government officials, views from activists on both sides, interviews with politicians as well as others speeches, interviews and opinions, including letters to the editor. Items were examined based on the substance of their contents, the sources consulted and the interpretation of information and facts provided.

Content analysis was deemed the most appropriate method for collecting the data required because it as a method of studying and analyzing communication content in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger, cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). It can be a useful device for discovering and describing the focus of individual, group, institutional, or

social attention (Weber, 1990) and allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection

Still there are several limitations of this study. By using only the print media to assess the performance of the media on the renewed agitation for Biafra by IPOB it did not capture the peculiarities of other mass media genres; most notably online platforms. Furthermore, by using an online search it relied on the assumption that all articles printed by the newspaper were uploaded online (and similarly assumed that all articles online were also printed). Another potential limitation was that it assumes that each website has the same quality of internal search function as this might limit its ability to do the keyword search on which the data collection solely relies.

Findings

All the 15 items in Daily Trust were news stories. Nine of them are from officials of the Federal Government; three are from groups sympathetic to the Muhammadu Buhari led Federal government; the remaining three derived from IPOB, MASSOB and a former Rivers state official sympathetic to the agitation of IPOB.

Five of nine stories attributable to the Federal Government officials were statements made by the Inspector General of Police; Chief of Defence Staff; and officials from the Department of State Service. They present either warnings to IPOB activists or outline directives threatening action against agitators. Examples include “We won’t negotiate with IPOB...-CDS” (3 June 2016); and “IGP orders AIGs, CPs to disarm IPOB agitators.” (1 June 2016). The three groups sympathetic to the cause of the northern Nigeria are the Jonde Jam Fulani Youth Association (JJYFA), Arewa Youths Integrity Forum and the Conference of Minority Tribes of Nigeria (CMTN). JJFYA in a statement “called on the Federal Government to prosecute members of the Indigenous People of Biafra said to be responsible for the abduction and murder of five Hausa and Fulani men allegedly buried in shallow graves in Abia State”. CMTN

“warned that Nigeria may be heading for the 1990 [sic] Rwanda styled genocide, if the perpetrators and their sponsors are not brought to justice”.

Of the 36 items in *The Punch*, 16 were discovered not to be relevant to the subject in question because they only featured IPOB or related elements in passing. Of the remaining 20, two are opinion articles: “Nigerian Vandals and an American example” (18 May 2016) and “Why do Fulani Lives matter?” (14 April 2016). The remaining 18 are news stories deriving mostly from press releases and public pronouncements of government officials and Kanu the leader of IPOB. Of particular note are two seeming contrasting pieces published on June 19 and 30 respectively. The first headline “IPOB backs Niger Delta Avengers” appeared at odds with the 30 June report “IPOB elders disown Avengers, MASSOB”.

Interestingly the 19 June statement by IPOB was used by *The Sun*. It was accompanied by an illustrative photograph featuring armed men in fighting mood. However, the same newspaper never published, at least online, the second report in an effort to give strength to the validity of the earlier claim. *The Sun* produced more stories on IPOB than the other two newspapers combined. Furthermore it often gave greater prominence to IPOB and MASSOB stories, accompanying them with strong visual imagery. All the items, except three, reviewed for this article were news reports, with most of them deriving from IPOB and IPOB-supporting sources. The three different editorial items were self-serving lengthy interviews with conspicuously bias Biafran agitators. *The Sun*, it can be argued, best fits the profile of a mouthpiece of IPOB, MASSOB and allied organizations.

Listed here are eleven headlines which reinforce this point.



1. “Don’t Push Ndigbo to the Wall”
2. “Alleged mass grave in Abia: IPOB, MASSOB angry with DSS”
3. “IPOB replaces Kanu’s lawyer”
4. “...Agitating Igbo groups form Biafra Peoples National Council”



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5. “Biafra: Igbo youths honour Nnamdi Kanu”
 6. “MASSOB backs Niger Delta Avengers on ultimatum to 7 govts”
 7. Biafra: IPOB Pledges Support for “Niger Delta Avengers”
 8. “Biafra trial: Kanu asks another federal judge to step down”
 9. “No force can stop Biafra”
 10. “Biafra: IPOB blasts Anioma”
 11. “Biafra: IPOB rejects army’s probe on killings”

Analysis

The leanings of the newspapers selected for this study lend credence to the assertion by McQuail (2010) and Omu (1996). McQuail (2010:29) notes that the later history of the newspaper can be told either as that of “a series of struggles, advances and reverses in the cause of liberty or as a more continuous history of economic and technological progress”.

The three newspapers used for this study appear to have furthered the reality in the assertions of both McQuail (2010) and Omu (1996). The Daily Trust newspaper, owned largely by Hausa-Fulani investors, is so unmistakably anti-Biafra and supportive of the Federal Government apparently because the sitting president is of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. From the stories cited above for instance, it is clear that the paper, though not owned by the government, was rather too eager to present reports of government security agencies and officials on the Biafran issue from the perspective largely critical of the IPOB agitation perceived to be anti-government.

This is because the government was still headed by President Buhari, a northerner, apparently deemed to be deserving of the newspaper's support and now that it is the turn of a fellow northerner to lead government. Daily Trust was no less excited to report only groups like Jonde Jam Fulani Youth Association (JJYFA) and Arewa Youths Integrity Forum (AYF) often quick to critical of IPOB and also sympathetic to the government incidentally at a time there were dissenting public statements from those sympathetic to the Biafran cause. Clearly, non of the stories fulfils any of the listed parameters of conflict sensitivity in the Howard (2004) checklist. The stories are one sided, smacked of tough-talk which heightens tension and generally derived from official releases only.

The Punch, a newspaper founded by a Yoruba businessman from the Yoruba ethnic group of the Southwest appears indifferent to the agitation for Biafra. Even at that, it lacked in conflict sensitivity as the reports did not reveal views diverse enough such as can assuage information seeking peacemakers or at least help to douse tension. This may easily be misinterpreted as likely endorsement for the IPOB agitation or support for the government depending on who is concerned or the specific context.

In what appeared to be sharply contrasting to the stance of Daily Trust, The Sun which remains the most visible national newspaper owned by any Igbo man from the south eastern part of the country, gave all the visibility it could muster to only pro-IPOB and related reports disregarding, almost in equal proportion, any relevant story emanating from the government side. Virtually all reports published were accompanied with photographs and or illustrations to strengthen their credibility. The frequency of the stories was also quite unmistakable. As with the duo of Daily Trust and The Punch, little or no consideration at all was given to conflict sensitivity as pro-Biafra sentiment held sway all through even as the brutal effect of the Civil War on the southeast of Nigeria remains till date. As was the case with Daily Trust the stories were one sided and generally added to the prevailing tension.

It was conspicuous that the papers were out to do whatever was possible to advocate for the cause of the owner's bias in line with the trend in history. One strong question that arises here however is: What happens to the seeming aspiration to be fair to all, often exhibited by Nigerian newspapers in their usually advertised mission and philosophy?

The trend noted in the conduct of these newspapers further reinforced the observations by Adebawwi (2009) Wakili (2009) and Abdu and Alabi (2009). Adebawwi notes that the Nigerian press aligns with the ethno-regional arrangement of the country in the way it reports on power relations. Wakili (2009) too asserts that few of the newspapers reported dispassionately or without any visible attachment to one side. He further observes that comments on conflicts are often shallow, subjective and poorly researched. Abdu and Alabi (2009:150) provide further evidence to support this claim, accusing media reports of repeating "deep seated prejudices" and "exhibiting traits of inflaming and inciting one party in the conflict against the other...of lacking of sensitivity to the ethno-religious sensibilities of people and through this not only contribute to escalating conflicts but also creating new ones".

Furthermore, the predominance of news reports in all of the three newspapers selected for this study pointedly revealed a set of gaps including the prevailing disregard for investigative journalism, researched and balanced reporting and in-depth interviews. Most of the reports assessed for this study came from armchair journalism that is reliant either on public pronouncements or official press releases of government officials. If an issue as troubling issue as the agitation for Biafra does not merit truly serious attention from the media, reporting that may trigger attention for resolution from different quarters, what issue could?

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CHAPTER THREE

STILL QUESTING FOR BIAFRA: CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY IN STRUGGLE?

Benjamin Timi Olujohungbe



Against the backdrop of renewed agitations by a variety of groups for an independent state of Biafra the ‘political intentionality’ of the ongoing struggle for secession vis-à-vis the precedent agitation for a sovereign state, which culminated in a ‘no victor, no vanquished’ post-war settlement, are worth exploring.

By intentionality, we draw ideas from a philosophical perspective and refer to “the power of the mind to be about, to represent or to stand for things, properties and states of affairs” (Jacob, 2010). To be specific, political intentionality as employed in the context of the discourse on the struggle for Biafra includes, but transcends, mental states. Extending to cover all of the motivations and actions characterizing the agency of actors in political struggle and the very ends for which their actions are appropriated.

The consideration of the political intentionality of the ongoing secessionist agitations here is apt given that the modern struggle has a precedence: the Biafran war, which began on 30 May 1967. It is important to determine how much, if at all, the agitation for Biafra today maintains a line of direct continuity with this earlier secessionist struggle.

Looking into the political intentionality of ‘Biafra today’ requires a recognition of the plurality of voices questing for secession. Today’s struggle for Biafra is marked by an array of groups that on the surface appear, for the most part, to seek the same goal, albeit with different methods. This includes the Ohaneze Ndigbo a socio-political group which considers itself as “the apex organization of the entire Igbo people of Nigeria”(Ohaneze Ndigbo, 1999); the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); The Rebranded Indigenous People of Biafra (TRIPOB); the Reformed Indigenous People of Biafra (RE-IPOB); and the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM). All are acting as dramatis personae in a drama which seems to lack a clear plot.

This plurality of groups, which characterises the contemporary struggle for Biafra, also bear the scars of schism. Several of the groups listed have emerged from the others. RE-IPOB emerged from IPOB insisting that the original vision for the struggle was being lost and that it would bring ideological renewal to the movement; a claim which aimed to assert its “right to speak [alone] for Biafra” (Alaribe, 2016). The cacophony which the plural voices generate provides an impetus for an inquest into the intentionality of the contemporary struggle for Biafra. The focus is on determining what constitutes the motivating factors for the key actors who have extended their agency to incorporate the masses into the struggle for a new Biafra.

A Tale of Two Biafras

According to Raisa Simola, “the clearest consensus among the Igbo concerns the motive for the Biafran secession: survival. The massacres of 1966 and 1967 were the main reason why the Igbo wanted a country apart from Nigeria” (Simola, 2000, 111). Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, himself a chief protagonist of the 1967 secession struggle, wrote that “for Biafra, the aim of the war was to survive, nothing more, nothing less...Biafra was, despite propaganda and the falsification of history, a reflex for self-protection and self-preservation because we were forced”. Odumegwu-Ojukwu alludes here to the attacks and killing of Igbos, particularly in the Northern region, after the counter-coup of July 1966 (Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1989, 167-169). The idea of Biafra arose from the ashes of what was perceived as the lop-sided

arrangement of the Nigerian polity; particularly in terms of the distribution of power and resources which was viewed as having favoured the Hausa and Yoruba - Nigeria's two other main ethnic groups - at the expense of the Igbo.

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The quest for ‘survival’ by the people of the Eastern region has been resuscitated in contemporary agitations, albeit with certain distinctions. The first difference between the two Biafran struggles - that of the 1960s and the current agitation - has to do with the proximate preludes to the decision to secede. The first Biafra movement was the product of a decision reached by consensus and led by the then Governor of the Eastern region of Nigeria, Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu. Having been assured of the backing of the advisory committee of chiefs and elders, Odumegwu-Ojukwu with further support from the Eastern House Constituent Assembly declared a free and sovereign state of Biafra on 27 May 1967 (Madiabo, 2000, 93). The declaration of a sovereign state of Biafra at that point in history was aimed at protecting the interest and wellbeing of the Eastern Region and its people. Given the support of the committee of chiefs and elders and the Eastern House Constituent Assembly, the Biafran declaration was a watershed moment in the struggle.

The second Biafra, for which agitations started to gather pace after the return to multi-party democracy in 1999, came under the banner of MASSOB. It contrasts sharply with the first. MASSOB is not an initiative of the state. It also does not engage with the Ohaneze Ndigbo - an organization that is the contemporary of the 1967 advisory committee of chiefs and elders - which although maintains that Igbos are marginalized in national affairs, refuses to support the quest for secession. MASSOB acting as a non-state identity has, since 1999, taken a different approach in clamouring for the actualization of the independent state of Biafra.

From MASSOB, a schismatic identity, IPOB, emerged in 2015, led by Nnamdi Kanu. MASSOB was quick to denounce Kanu, blaming him for inciting violence in the struggle for an independent Biafra (Vanguard, Oct. 19, 2015). But this was not the last splintering of the movement's identity. In 2016, two further schismatic identities emerged from IPOB; TRIPOB, which made an offer of dialogue to the Federal Government of Nigeria, and RE-IPOB which proclaimed that IPOB had ceased to be relevant in the struggle for Biafra (Alaribe, 2016). However, TRIPOB and RE-IPOB have been unable to sustain popular momentum. In 2017, BZM led by Benjamin Onwuka – another identity agent in the struggle - emerged and dismissed IPOB's agitation as “a waste of time”. They insist that the actualization of Biafra will only happen when the government of the United States of America gives formal recognition to the interim Biafran government, which Onwuka himself formed (Daily Post, July 17, 2017; Vanguard, Oct. 18, 2017).

The differences between the two Biafras are better accounted for in what Godwin Onuoha refers to as “inter-generational relations and the dialectics of contestations” (Onuoha, 2014, 17-20). The intergenerational relations in the struggle for a new Biafra can be perceived from the orientation of MASSOB; an identity which directs its propaganda towards traders and youth who are better able to relate to the experience of marginalization and social exclusion. The Ohaneze Ndigbo by comparison, is considered to be oriented towards the elite by post-war Biafran agitators. A politics from above and below (Onuoha, 2014, 10-14) approach partly explains the popularity which Nnamdi Kanu commands among the masses in Nigeria's South-East today.

Another distinction between the first and second Biafran movements is in the delineation of the geo-political space referred to as Biafra. During the first agitation for an independent state of Biafra, the geo-political space was not restricted to the physical area of land inhabited by the Ndigbo; it included ethnic groups such as the Efik, Ikwerre, Ijaw and Ibibio among others. But contemporary Nigeria is now balkanized into 36 states; with each asserting distinct identities and agency in the scheme of national affairs. The cartography arranged by IPOB for the second Biafra,

which includes states within the Niger-Delta or the South-South political zone, ignores the reality of this altered geo-political space.

Beyond drawing on the rhetoric of marginalization and survival which the quests for Biafra share, it is obvious that both struggles are far from being a continuum as a result of the equivocation that has dogged modern agitations. Deciphering the political intentionality of the ongoing secessionist movement is fraught with complexity, given that several of the key actors in the recent secessionist agitations have, in the process of struggle, displayed elements of 'the messianic complex' (Analytical Psychology and Psychoanalysis, 2011). Elements of this complex – an orientation characterized by a person claiming to be the liberator of a mass of people - can be gleaned from the regal appearance of Nnamdi Kanu in public or the unrealistic expectations nursed by Benjamin Onwuka that an independent Biafra is only possible when the U.S government recognizes the interim government of which he is president. Tracing the intentionality of the contemporary struggle for Biafra is only possible when a separation of what counts as authentic, altruistic and harmonious struggle on the one hand and the personal desires of its leaders on the other, has been properly accomplished.

Conclusion

The two agitations for an independent state of Biafra share, at least on the surface, a single cause; to address the perceived marginalization of Igbos living in Eastern Nigeria with regards to the administration of power and the distribution of resources. However it is not clear that the two struggles for Biafra, occurring at different times in the history of Nigeria, can be seen on a continuum in which the latter flows directly from the former. In fact, given the schisms that have dominated the second struggle for Biafra, it is convenient to imagine that the claim of a people being at the receiving end of a national polity that marginalizes suffices as a convenient means of advancing a politics of recognition. But this only extends so far as to service the proximate interests of particular key actors in the identity politics that the quest for Biafra is.

The political intentionality of the struggle for Biafra today can thus be said to be amorphous. It is at best a complex identity politics characterized by a plurality of agencies mutually annihilating each other despite the single task they claim to agitate for. The plurality of the voices agitating for Biafra and the undeclared private interests the key actors may have is best captured by Matthew Kukah's description of "ethnic entrepreneurs and the politics of power sharing" (Kukah, 2011, 341ff).

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ISBN: 978-978-972-765-0



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