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The Nigeria-Biafra war,  
popular culture and  
agitation for sovereignty  
of a Biafran nation

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## **Abstract**

The date 6 July 2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the war considered as one of the worst in recent human history, the Nigeria-Biafra war. My paper focuses on the representation of this war in popular culture – with an emphasis on film, fictional and non-fictional literature. It interrogates the role that fictional and non-fictional narration play in the collective and individual memory of Nigerians in general and the Igbos in particular. It also looks at the link between the depiction of the war in popular culture and the renewed agitation for the nationhood of Biafra, as since the 2000s, there has been renewed campaigning by young people of Igbo ethnicity for the creation of the Republic of Biafra. This research particularly concentrates on two organizations that are involved in this struggle: the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

It is my position that popular culture constitutes important material for the study and understanding of historical events and periods of time, while it also enhances our understanding of the ways in which these past events may have an influence in the present.

## **Introduction**

The Nigeria-Biafra war took place over a 30-month period (from July 1967 to 15 January, 1970). Since the 1970s, there have been tremendous fictional and non-fictional narratives on the subject, followed by many critical essays on these narratives. It may be right to state that any literature that is constructed using the war as background cannot be referred as work of fiction, even when the main plot and characters are the writers creation. The blend of real events with the author's imagination can at the worst make it – fact[ional] narrative. This blend of fact and fiction in narration is the base for theory of new historicism – “an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text” (New World Encyclopedia).

Mackintosh (1971: xxv), gave a list of twenty-three published books on Nigeria-Biafra war between 1968 and 1969 alone. Many of the early narratives on the war were written by

foreigners-relief workers, journalists, missionaries and independent observers - but the majority of the narratives authored by Nigerians after the war, comes from those with cultural affiliation to the Igbos - the main ethnic group known as Biafra. This in a way keeps the war in our collective and individual memories in order that it may guide our decision in both present and future circumstance.

The fact that many of the narratives are written by Igbos coupled with the renewed agitation for Biafra's sovereignty since 1999, "is a reminder of things unsettled, the recollection of which is an excursion into meaning reconstruction in the context of a perceived marginalization" (Oloyede, 2009: 2). To regard the rhetoric of the Igbos as 'perceived marginalization', as stated by Oloyede, means, it is fundamental that this perception be addressed. Are the Igbos really marginalized or not? If they are, then, one can agree with Nnamani (2016), that Biafra "still remains an intractable unfinished business that seriously threatens the corporate existence of Nigeria" (Back page). Therefore, one can relate to the continuous growth in the numbers of Nigeria-Biafra war narratives as a call on the Federal Government of Nigeria never to forget the reasons for the war.

There are arguments on the many factors which fertilized the Nigerian soil for the necessity of the war. What are these factors that made the war inevitable? Has Nigeria overcome those factors that accounted for the war of 1967-1970? Although one cannot but emphasize the role played by corruption, it is very difficult to rule out as factor, the differences and incompatibility of the many ethnic nationalities "sardined" together as one Nigeria. This in a way create the culture of nepotism - a preference for people from one's ethnicity, religion and that shared same language. This factor is explored as one of the thematic preoccupations of Adichie's two narratives on Biafra (*For Love of Biafra*, 1998 and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2006) and Obasanjo's account of the war *My Command*, 1980. For example, Adichie (2006) captures in the voice of the character known as Odenigbo:

Can't you see that we are not all alike except to white eyes?. . . I am a Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came (20).

This statement from Adichie's "factional" narrative, is not much different from Obasanjo's (1980) memoir:

"the war itself is a culmination of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued Nigeria from independence. That uneasy and stability had their genesis in the geography, history and demography of Nigeria. But the immediate cause of the war itself may be identified as the coup and counter-coup of 1966, which alter the political equation and destroy the fragile trust existing among the major ethnic groups (xi).

Contrary to Obasanjo's 'fragile trust', there seems not to be any trust among the major ethnic groups at all. This lack of trust accounts for the British's division of the country along the regional line in the first instance with each region being governed by leaders from the dominant ethnic group within that region right until May 1967 when Gen. Yakubu Gowon divided the country to 12 states. I think instead of 'fragile trust', we should have 'fragile tolerance'. Efiong (2016) buttresses this, "Ethnicity had also been enthroned in the Nigerian political scene to the extent that the slogan 'North for the Northerners, West for the Westerners and East for the Easterners' had come to represent the feelings of hatred, division and victimization" (42-43). For instance, in 1959, shortly before the federal election, the Northern Political Congress "threatened that if the Southern parties allied to capture power at the federal level, North would secede" (Ademoyega, 1981: 8).

The ever-increasing construction of Biafran identity in literature, audio and visual images establish it as a form of popular culture - a significant cultural expression. This is

more enhanced by the nature of consumerism attached to the cultural emblem - the coat of arms and flag of Biafra. Popular culture presents the Nigeria-Biafra war as 'living material' different from a calcified event in human history or that which remains only in the Igbos' and Nigerians' communal imagination. According to Oloyede (2009), "The Biafra war, as an event and Biafra, as assumptive world, continue to disrupt individual and collective memories and as such tend to 'frame' state and politics in Nigeria as evidenced both in political discourse and political practice" (1). If Oloyede's position is considered alongside the growth in popular narratives on the war, it becomes easier to share Hodges (2009) observation that Adichie's 2006 novel on Biafra, is "an invitation to reflect on the fact that although Biafran war literature has, as an oeuvre, been deeply concerned with the problem of closure - a full and final accounting - the oeuvre itself continues to grow and evolve" (1).

Whereas, Ademoyega's *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* may be seen as an attempt by one of the officers who ignited the fire that snowballed into the Nigeria-Biafra war to paint a-hero-like image of himself, yet, I find the work to be a reliable material in its narration of the many factors that led to the January 1966 coup and eventually the war that came after. In the same way that I extensively used Efiog's *The Caged Bird Sang No More: My Biafra Odyssey, 1966-1970*, a publication by Biafra's Commander-in-Chief after Ojukwu left on exile.

### **The Factors That Influenced Nigeria-Biafra War**

Many of the published historical accounts of the active participants and observers of the war averred three main factors that ignited the war.

1. The perceived "Ibo" coup of 15 January 1966 which saw the death of prominent political and military leaders from the Northern, Western and Midwestern regions of the country.

2. The May civil riots in the North with the counter coup of July 1966 that saw the killing of mainly military leaders from Eastern region of the country by young officers from the Northern region, and the pogrom unleashed on the Igbo people living in the Northern part of the country that led to the death of about 30,000 people.

3. The 30 May 1967 declaration of Republic of Biafra by Lieutenant Colonel (Later Gen.) Odumegwu Ojukwu - a clear secession from Nigeria. His declaration was premised on the ground that people of the Eastern region no longer felt safe in other parts of the Federation (The Aburi Conference, 1967: 3).

The fourth and major factor that was silent in almost all the historical and other narratives is the British oil and economic interest. The fact that the British government protection of its oil interest in Nigeria played a significant influence in pushing Nigeria to war against Biafra's secession. While available official material by the British Government states that, "Britain officially hinged its support for 'One Nigeria'" on the need to prevent the break-up of Nigeria, and indeed African states in general, along tribal lines influenced her decision for the support against Biafra, evidence on ground proved otherwise. Based on available evidence, Chibuike (2008:113) asserts, "British oil interests played a much more important role in the determination of the British attitude to the war than is usually conceded." As Kirkpatrick (2015) writes:

Another big disadvantage Biafra had against the Federal Government was that General Gowon had strong relations with Britain and the High British Commissioner Cumming-Bruce. Britain helped support the war with arms deals and shipments to Nigeria all throughout 1967-1970. Britain's main involvement with the war was trying to help end the war because of the large supply of oil that Nigeria and Biafra sits on (online).

Why will Britain support Nigeria with arms and its shipments to prosecute the war right from the outbreak of the war to the end of it if the former had not encouraged the latter to adopt the war option in the first instance with promise of arms in the case that the use of force becomes inevitable? How do you fund a war in order to end it without recording monumental loss of human lives and provoking major humanitarian crisis? As Kirkpatrick writes “Britain is refreshing its efforts to end the war due to the threat of starvation of many civilians in Biafra and the continuing arms deals costing the country millions” (online), and the mass condemnation of its support of the war among the British public.

This attention on Britain, is not to undermine the position of France who also supported Biafra in the expectation of favourable oil concessions resulting from the latter’s military victory against Nigeria (Draper, 1999: 185). In a material available at the Public Record Office (PRO) which Chibuike (2008) cited to arrive at his conclusion:

To refer publicly in the House to our economic stake in Nigeria would be inadvisable as it would be misunderstood or misrepresented ... Nevertheless, the facts are that Shell and BP have invested at least £250 million in Nigeria on which we now expect a large and increasing return of great importance to the British balance of payments. Other investments are worth up to £175 million. Our annual export trade is about £90 million [...] All this would be at risk if we abandoned our policy of support for the Federal Government and others would be quick to take our place (PRO FCO 65/ 157).

Therefore, the control and exploration of oil by foreign nations was a major factor in the decision to engage in the war. Other factors that accounted for the war include corruption, party and national leadership tussle, government’s insensitivity to unrest and killings in some part of the country, the failed coup d’état of January 15, 1966 considered an Ibo coup. This is followed by the counter coup of July 15, 1966 generally accepted to be prosecuted by military



officers of Hausa/Northern Nigerian descent, finally, the mass killings of Ibos residing in the Northern Region of the country and the reported reprisal attacks against Northerners in the Eastern Region. However, it needs to be stated that participants of the first coup, were drawn from the three regions of the country - with at least five officers of Northern extraction. Although the two coup d'état ignited the war, yet, one needs to understand "the volatile nature of the Western Region from 1962 to 1966 "in addition to wide-ranging corruption in government that led to the first coup d'état in 1966" (Nnamani 2016).

It is also probable that Gen. Yakubu Gowon, Head of Federal Government of Nigeria, must have been prevailed upon by a foreign government after returning from the Aburi conference in January 1967 not to agree to the Biafra secession, to explore every option available in order to maintain the unity of Nigeria. One may not be able to rule out the theory of conspiracy as well. Those who averred this theory argue that if Nigeria should be engulfed in war, it will not be able to harness its potential for development into an African leading superpower that may challenge leading nations of the world. According to Oyinbo (1971):

Nigeria, with 25,000,000 more people than the next most populous country in the continent, with an area of 350,000 square miles of rich and varied resources, and with potential for industrial development unequalled by any other West African nation, had to be a success. In all of Africa south of the Sahara only the Congo, independent since June 30, had equivalent overall potential among the African states of the present or the future, and by October the Congo was already in chaos (1).

The chaotic situation in the two potential African leading countries of the 1960s mentioned in the quotation above, may suggest an external orchestration.

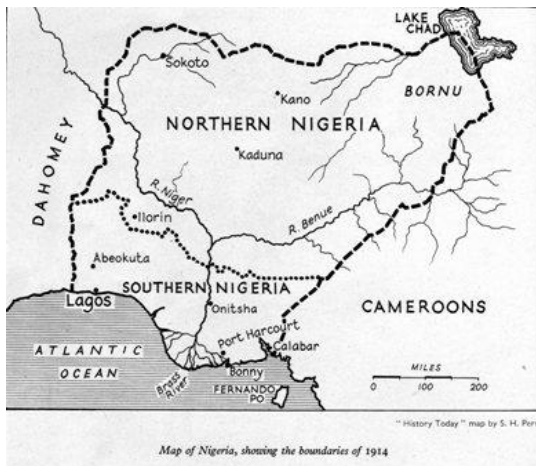
## **Ethnic Colouration and the Nigerian State**

Nigeria is a nation created by the British Colonial office in 1914, after the amalgamation of the Northern Protectorate of the Niger and Southern Protectorate of the Niger. For over 100 years of its existence, a large segment of its society have come to embrace the Nigeria nomenclature as national identity. However, many of the people argue that the political class of the society have failed overtime to allow the blending of the many ethnic nationalities within its borders to have a sense of belonging or ownership of the state. Therefore, the call for the restructuring of the nation or collapse of the nation-state continues to be a recurring decimal in national debate. As Okpanachi (2010: 2) notes, “From its inception as a colonial state, Nigeria has faced a perennial crisis of territorial or state legitimacy, which has often challenged its efforts at national cohesion, democratization, stability and economic transformation.” This is based on the fact that it has roughly 500 hundred ethnic nationalities within its border, thereby making it one of the very few most diverse nation on the earth.

The British had capitalized on the lack of trust and differences in the various groups in the newly formed country to further its own political ideology by dividing Nigeria during the colonial period into three regions Northern, Western and Eastern in 1946. We only need to ask why the British Colonial office would split Southern Nigeria into West and East while the Northern part with more diverse ethnic nationalities, larger land space and very complex religious differences was left untouched. As Ademoyega (1981) would write, the British “set up the North to be bigger than the South, planned to hand over to them, an Army that was more than 50% Northern” (32), having concluded the plan of handing the political leadership of the country to them too. In the words of Badru (1998), “duration and persistence depended largely on the ability of the British colonialists to play one ethnic group against the other” (70). This system favoured the ‘divide and rule’ and the ‘indirect rule’ policies of the colonial office as it allowed for the ease in the administration of the nation with minimal financial

commitment, and at the same time taking charge of the economic resources of the nation without challenge.

The map of Nigeria, shows two-third of the land mass allocated to the Northern Region as at 1914 not minding the linguistic similarities (there are communities in the North that share both ancestral and languages with communities in the South).



Courtesy: <http://www.dcstamps.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/MAF-Southern-Nigeria-Map.jpg>

Up to this moment, every materials available argued that Nigeria is divided along three major ethnic nationalities – Hausa or Hausa-Fulani (North), Yoruba (West) and Ibo (East). Evidence on ground in Nigeria, suggests that Hausa and Fulani are actually not the majority ethnic groups in the North. While it may seem confusing to ascertain the population of Hausa-Fulani based on the predominant use of the Hausa language in the area, one only has to look at the spread of other ethnic groups within the region. For example, Kanuri is the predominant ethnic group in Bornu, the Jukun of Northern Nigeria, at present in Taraba, Gombe, Nasarawa, Plateau, Adamawa and Benue states of the country. They are also found scattered in different settlement from the Benue valley to Cameroun bearing different identities but aligning in ancestral and many cultural practices. Examples are the Ibira found in present day Kogi and Nasarawa States, Kona found in Adamawa.

Afigbo (2005) writes that Shehu Dan Fodio summary of the history of the Central

Sudan mentioned an empire known as Kwararafa., which “was later identified with the Jukun of the Benue valley”(70). According to Adelberger and Storch (2008: online) it took the combine France’s military power in Luis Mizon and the Emirate of Muri to defeat the Kona Jukun who were the main kingdom in Adamawa up until 1892. Mizon who was in possession of “four-pounder quick-firing cannon and carrying altogether 100 Senegalese sharpshooters, set off along the River Niger. [...] with 150 modern rifles with 18,000 rounds of ammunition and 100 revolvers with 15,000 rounds” at the time. Emir Muhammadu Nya’s troops “consisted of about 700 Fulani infantrymen, 120 cavalymen, 500 allied archers and spearmen, and 20 sharpshooters with Snider rifles” (Adelberger and Storch, 2008). Within this region, there are also the Tiv, Nupe and the Igala kingdoms with very large population and occupation of large space of land. This information is necessary to make a point that at the time of colonial occupation of Nigeria, Hausa-Fulani could not have been the largest ethnic group in the North of the country.

### **Popular Culture and The Recent Framing of Biafra**

Popular is an expression of culture. As culture is a complex word to define, so, is the term used in its expression - mass culture, popular culture and so on. Williams (1983:90) gives three broad definitions of culture based on its usage, - two of which are most valuable in the expression of popular culture, especially in relation to our discussion on Nigeria-Biafra:

1. It is a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development.
2. It is a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group.
3. It is the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.

The second definition relates to cultural practice that encompasses religious belief and festivals, custom and other mode of cultural signifiers. In the words of Storey (2001), the third definition “would make us think of examples such as poetry, the novel, ballet, opera, fine art”

(2), drama, soap opera, music, film and so on. Therefore, popular culture, “is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc” (Storey, 2001:1). In whatever way we look at it, popular culture is determined by human construction and mass consumption, also is its relationship to the politics of class in the society. As Reed (n.d) opines, “culture does not float free from politics, economics, social institutions, or other structural factors [...] Culture is neither fully autonomous, nor reducible to these other forces, but is interwoven with them in complex, mutually influencing ways” (online). To understand this, one needs to look at the ideology of culture or the concept of displacement or domination. At least something “must give” for something to be “popular”. Ideology will help us to answer the question of what is popular.

Storey (2001) refers to ideology as “a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people” (3). This may refer to the philosophy that guides the practices and operations of either a professional group or political party. In another instance, ideology may present a certain masking, distortion, and concealment, especially in relation to distorted images of reality presented in some cultural texts. In this case, ideology makes the dominating class have a different view of their position as oppressors of the powerless, who in-turn refuse to see themselves as the oppressed or the dominated. And the oppressed are quick to create for themselves political identity which in-turn become consumed by majority of the class. To link this to the ideology of materials or activities creation, means to first identify how the mass of the population react to it - determines its popularity. Since technology and entertainment have become factors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural consumption, it becomes easier for whatever product the underclass construct to have mass consumers. Crossman (2016), definition of Popular culture as “the accumulation of cultural products such as music, art, literature, fashion, dance, film, cyber culture, television and radio that are consumed [by] the majority of

a society's population. Popular culture as mass accessibility and appeal” (Online), could relate to Biafra, if we consider the consumerism associated with it. The construction and commercialization of Biafra as a product have seen its representation not just in films, music, art, and mass production of fashion and accessories depicting the image as a mode of cultural expression.

Biafra in popular culture has seen its depiction in films, music, art, and mass production of fashion and accessories with the coat of arms and flag as modes of cultural expression. Apart from the many literature on Biafra, there are quite few number of feature films which central narrative is the Nigeria-Biafra war. Case in point are Antoine Fugua’s *Tears of the Sun*, which featured many Hollywood mainstream actors and shot in part of West Africa; Biyi Bandele’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* a screen version of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel of the same title. *Half of a Yellow Sun* was shot over a five-week period at TINAPA in Cross River State, Nigeria. The state was part of Eastern Nigeria during the Nigeria-Biafra war. The most recent feature on Biafra is Tolulope Olamide Ajayi’s short film *The Encounter* which is basically on the final meeting between Ifeajunah, one of the masterminds of the 15 January 1966 coup and Odumegwu Ojukwu - Biafra’s Head of State before the former was executed by the latter.

What has kept the Nigeria-Biafra war in our collective memories is the continuous representation of the war in literature and in popular culture. In Nigeria, the Federal Government on its own part has tried to obliterate the existence of the war from the memory of Nigerians. Obasanjo (1980) who emerged as the nation’s Head of State in February 1976 (barely 6 years after the war) would write, “...I believe that the wounds inflicted by the war are by now *sufficiently* healed” in a way to create the illusion of “all is well”, when in fact all is not well. How can people who lost their loved ones in a war they did not win, lost the fight for ethnic, geographical, political and economic independence healed sufficiently in less than

a decade?

Although, media were used in the war as propaganda tools, nevertheless, the coverage of the war assisted in projecting the horror to the living of opinion leaders of the time, and to also retain it in both our collective and individual memory. According to Edith's (2017), "the horror of the Nigeria-Biafra war was brought to me as a teenager in Netherlands through the black and white television. I watched the very lean bodies of the Biafra children and women during the war, it was painful, and I cannot forget it as the first televised war broadcast as it was happening."<sup>1</sup>

### **The Nexus Between the Old Declaration and the New Agitation for Biafra Nation**

Biafra today is to a great extent an Igbo ethnic group affair, unlike the old declaration that involved many ethnic groups within the Eastern Nigeria region.<sup>2</sup> In the present 36 States arrangement in Nigeria, the Igbos alone occupy 5 State.<sup>3</sup> The current two prominent groups that are in the vanguard of the demand of a sovereign state of Biafra are: MASSOB under the leadership of Ralph Nwanzuruike which emerged in 1999, and IPOB headed by Nnamdi Kanu which emerged in 2015. Both Nwanzuruike and Kanu have experienced the rough arms of the Nigerian government for their agitation. While the former and other prominent members of MASSOB have spent numbers of time in prisons across Nigeria starting from 2000, Kanu is having his first experience in prison where he has been since 18 October 2015. Kanu has been locked in prison even while he has not been convicted by any Nigerian court of law.

There might seem not to be a significant link between the 1967 declaration of the

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<sup>1</sup> Edith (69 years old) and Hans her husband were my landlord at the time of this research in Leiden, our conversation on 5th March, 2017 produced the quoted statement.

<sup>2</sup> The ethnic groups include: Ijo, Kalabari, Ogoni, Efik, Ibibio, Oron, Annang, Ika, Ogoni, Bakassi, Ogoja, Obono, Ikwerre, Okrika, Engenni, Etche, Ogba, Ibani, Opobo, Eleme, Ejagham, Bekwarra, Boki, Yakurr, Agoi, BahumonoYala, Igede, Ukelle, Bete, Abanajum, Nseke, Ofutop, Olulumo, Etung, Ekajjuka, Mbube, Yacha, and some others within the Benue valley. However, Igbo was the dominant ethnicity.

<sup>3</sup> The states include: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.

Republic of Biafra that led to Nigeria-Biafra war and the renewed demand for the independence of Biafra than the name “Biafra” which has assumed political identity for the Igbos. However on a closer observation, it may become clearer that nothing has changed in Nigeria since the Nigeria-Biafra war in terms of failed leadership, official corruption, nepotism and the internal conflicts occasioned by the inability of the Nigerian government to guarantee the safety of its citizens living and operating in an area different from that of their ethnic group. For example, MASSOB was formed on the basis of the continuous massacre of Igbos in the Northern part of the country in the 1990s. This does not validate or invalidate the genuine agitation for self-determination that is being demanded. Although, arguments are rife as to the legitimacy of the two groups based on the youthful composition of the bulk of the agitators. To further distance the groups from the Nigeria-Biafra war is the position of some critics that - those currently agitating for the nation of Biafra did not witness the extent and damage of the 30 month-long war, and if few of them do, they were probably too young to understand the situation that made it necessary, therefore could not comprehend the extent of lives lost and other damages. The IPOB protesters are mainly young employed and unemployed individuals who only need some positive change in their lives. This is contrary to the conclusion of Okeke (2016):

But the more critical issue is that written all over the faces of these neo-Biafran citizens are anger and frustration, against a state (the Nigerian state) to which they should have contentedly belonged. It was easy to conclude that all the protesters were unemployed individuals. They were mainly young people. And the truth is that these youths were not necessarily clamouring for Biafra. They only need some form of positive change in their lives. Thus, the struggle for Biafra has become a metaphor for changing the material conditions of these young people (76).



The clear factor between old self-determination and the current wave for agitation is the evolvement of a Biafran cultural identity as representing the Igbo. The old Biafra was a political identity, whereas, the retention of the war in our collective memory assisted in the transition to the evolvement of Biafra as both cultural signifier and identity that describe both the diasporic Igbo and the Igbo of Nigeria. While the old declaration adopted a violent confrontational approach with the Nigeria nation, the new wave is premised on peace demonstration through global protestation and media propaganda.

### **Biafran Agitation and Media Appropriation**

Media, especially the social media have been well deployed by the current agitators for the Biafran state. While MASSOB made minimal use of the media between 1999 and the early 2000s, relying mainly on the report of its many protests on state and privately owned radio and television broadcast and newspaper reports, IPOB on the other hands set-up online radio and television stations. This is not markedly different from the events of the 1960s when Gen. Ojukwu established the Voice of Biafra as the authentic avenue for the broadcasting of events in the seceding nation during the Nigeria-Biafra war.

Unlike Ojukwu's Voice of Biafra, IPOB's Radio Biafra established by Nnamdi Kanu, broadcasts from London and transmits on shortwave broadband via the internet to not just Igbos in Nigeria, but everywhere in world. The numerous protests carried out by the group in many countries of the world are relayed on many mainstream media. The videos of the events are available on YouTube with comments by many followers. The use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp have also assisted in drawing traffic to the cause of IPOB. Biafrans post videos on Facebook, use the medium to connect with another, and also share the photographs and speeches of Nnamdi Kanu whenever he appears in court. Members are updated with events around the world on WhatsApp. IPOB adoption of the social media

have raised the status of the group and its leader beyond the initial perceived notion of the Igbo politicians who thought the agitation will die a natural death within a short time.

## **Conclusions**

I have chosen to represent the war as the Nigeria-Biafra war as opposed to Nigeria Civil war or Biafra war found in some works, especially in New World Encyclopedia. This is because Biafrans returned to their ancestral homeland in the Eastern part of Nigeria and demanded for independence and sovereignty from the polity, as a reaction to the killings they were being subjected to in the Northern part of country without the Federal Government showing any serious concern. This is contrary to J.B. Gewald's position that Biafra was part of Nigeria and as such it is appropriate to refer to the conflict as Nigerian Civil War.<sup>4</sup> As Douglas (2010) notes, "Calling it the 'Nigerian Civil War' – as is conventional – invites the critique of denying Biafra equal rhetorical footing with Nigeria and reinscribing Federal claims that Biafra was little more than a rebellious region of Nigeria" (41). To call it Nigeria-Biafra war is not about showing 'political sympathy' towards the Igbo people or to Biafra as the nation that died at birth. However, there is nothing wrong in sympathizing with a 'mother' who suffered miscarriage. Perhaps the earlier pregnancy came too early, and the child is pushing to be 'born again' as we are now experiencing in the current agitation for the sovereignty of Biafran nation being espoused by Movement for the Actualization for Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). As Onuoha (2011) observes, "One current feature of politics in recent times is the demand by various ethnic groups to gain political recognition and affirmation as distinct identities in a plural society" (1).

There is no universal law against clamouring for the birth of a 'new nation', however, there is need for the agitators to be adequately equipped for the consequences that may follow their demands. While the Biafran nation may or not come into existence, there is need for

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<sup>4</sup> Jan-Bart Gewald made this contribution during a seminar presentation I gave at African Studies Centre, Leiden on 30 January 2017.

preparedness on the part of the agitators and the international community who may be saddled with the aftermath of the agitation which might include humanitarian crisis. In order to forestall a repetition of borderline, internal leadership and economic crisis being faced in some countries like Eritrea and South Sudan, or violent change of government as experienced in the case of the Arab Spring, there is need to understand the plans that the agitators have.

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