

Why Biafran struggle persists: A study in conflict termination and recurrence

Nkwachukwu Orji

Institute for Development Studies,
University of Nigeria (Enugu Campus), Nsukka

Abstract

This article examines the reasons for the resurgence, persistence and recent intensification of the Biafran separatist struggle in Nigeria. It argues that three key contextual issues account for the resurgence of Biafra separatism, namely identity politics, political economy, and state-society relations. While the level of feeling of exclusion and collective victimisation by the separatists explain the persistence of Biafra separatism, the current momentum and escalation of the struggle can be linked to the perceived decline in the capacity of the state and certain government actions and inactions, which have led to a rapid increase in the corps of willing agitators. To de-escalate the conflict and achieve lasting peace, the article calls for a peacebuilding programme that is anchored in social justice, where the goal is not just to stop direct violence, but to address the underlying issues that gave rise to the conflict in the first place.

Keywords: Biafran Struggle, Separatist Agitation, Conflict Termination, Conflict Recurrence, Civil War, Peacebuilding.

Introduction

The persistence of the Biafran separatist agitation, five decades after it was believed to have been contained following the military victory of the Nigerian forces in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war of 1967–1970, constitutes an interesting puzzle. The tendency of academic literature to favour military victory as a method of civil conflict termination makes the resurgence of the Biafran struggle even more interesting. The idea of 'victor's peace' holds that military victories have a strong tendency to sustain peace because they send out a clear message about the relative capabilities of rivals, reduce the loser's organizational capacity to remobilise and restart conflict, and enable the victors to credibly threaten the losers with direct physical harm should they resume conflict (Wagner, 1993; Luttwak, 1999; Toft, 2010^a & 2010^b).

The resurgence and escalation of the Biafran struggle offer a strong challenge to the claims that military victories produce durable peace. Since 1999, pro-Biafra activists have adopted various methods, including civil disobedience and demonstrations, to challenge the Nigerian government and demand an exit from the Nigerian state. Pro-Biafra protests spiked

following the 14 October 2015 arrest of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), on charges of sedition, ethnic incitement and treasonable felony. Nnamdi Kanu was detained for two years and subsequently released. He reportedly left the country in September 2017 after security forces attempted to rearrest him (Kabir, 2018). On 27 June 2021, Kanu was apprehended in Kenya and brought back to Nigeria to face trial for terrorism.

The IPOB represent the most high-profile and radical movement for a separate State of Biafra that currently exists. The IPOB stepped up a struggle initiated by the government of the then Eastern Region in 1967 and revived by the Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) formed by Ralph Uwazuruike in 1999. Over the years, a combination of state repression and internal dissent weakened MASSOB and introduced deep cracks in its organisation (Ndidi, 2015). The weakening of MASSOB opened the way for IPOB to continue the agitation (Adibe, 2015).

The protests by IPOB have heightened tension and security concerns in Southeast Nigeria, increasing the pressure on the government to deal with

the agitation. On 18 September 2017, IPOB was declared a terrorist organisation and proscribed (Shaban, 2017). In August 2020, attempts by security forces to break up a meeting of the organisation in Enugu led to the killing of 21 IPOB members and two security agents (Young, 2020). Following the incident, IPOB pledged to retaliate and urged its members to start practising self-defence (Okoli, 2020). On 12 December 2020, IPOB announced the formation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as a regional security outfit and militant arm of the organisation (Okafor, 2020).

Since the formation of ESN, violent clashes between the IPOB and security forces have intensified. On 22 January 2021, Nigerian soldiers invaded the town of Orlu in Imo State in search of ESN operatives – one person was killed and eight buildings were burnt during the operation (Alozie, 2021). The ongoing operation to neutralise the ESN has resulted in serious casualties, including the death of the ESN Commander (Soniyi & Nwezeh, 2021). On 9 April 2021, leaders of IPOB and Anglophone Cameroonian separatist groups – the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC) and the Ambazonia Defence Forces – announced that they have entered into a

formal alliance, which will involve the exchange of weapons and personnel. The alliance could widen the resource base of the separatist groups and ignite cross-border and regional violence and instability in West and Central Africa where violent extremist organisations affiliated with the Islamic State and al Qaeda have established a strong foothold (Craig, 2021).

Given these developments, this article examines the resurgence and escalation of the Biafran separatist agitation. In doing so, it addresses three main questions: 1) Why has the agitation for Biafra persisted for more than five decades after the end of the Nigerian civil war? 2) What accounts for the current momentum and escalation of the struggle? 3) What can be done to de-escalate the conflict and achieve lasting peace?

Conflict Termination, Recurrence and Persistence

Common explanations for conflict termination and recurrence concentrate on the characteristics of the original conflict and the country in which the conflict took place. They focus on variables such as the intensity of the initial conflict, its duration, level of conflict incompatibility, and the method

of conflict termination. Scholars like Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, as well as Caroline Hartzell and her colleagues, believe that conflicts that produced great fatalities are likely to recur because of the entrenched emotions of resentment and revenge they tend to produce (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Hartzell, Hoddie & Rothchild, 2001). Furthermore, Smith and Stam (2003), and Walter (2004) argue that conflicts of a shorter duration are likely to recur because, on the one hand, the parties still retain their physical and resource capabilities, while on the other hand, there is incomplete information about the rivals' relative strength. There is also a body of literature that maintains that identity-based conflicts are difficult to resolve because they involve powerful emotional affiliations which are difficult and, in some cases, impossible to change (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Finally, the 'victor's peace' literature argues that conflicts ended by a negotiated settlement are likely to recur because negotiated settlements leave groups' infrastructure and organisation intact, making them able to resume the struggle at a future time (Licklider, 1995; Walter, 2002; Downes 2004).

Although the foregoing explanations are relevant to the analysis of the resurgence

of Biafra separatism, they do not offer specific information and nuanced analysis of the causal relations. Furthermore, the explanations highlight only the general patterns, which provide little guidance on the case before us. To understand why Biafra separatism persists, closer attention must be devoted to the peculiarities of the Nigerian context. To be sure, the above explanations ignored the all-important contextual questions of politics, political economy, and state-society relations.

There is a specific set of literature that attempts to explain the revival of Biafra separatism. This literature approaches the subject from identity politics, political-economy, and state-society relation perspectives. From the point of view of identity politics, the literature traces the resurgence of Biafra separatism to one of the great fault lines of Nigerian politics – ethnicity and inter-ethnic competition for federal power. While Ibrahim (2015), for example, claims that the resurgence of Biafra separatism is an expression of disappointment by the Igbo masses who have been disillusioned by the failure of their elite to secure federal power. Adetula (2015) and Owen (2016) link the resurgence of Biafra separatism to negotiation for power by local elites. For Adetula (2015:1), agitating for Biafra 'is

how local elites try to create greater political space for themselves'. Similarly, Owen (2016:8) sees the revival of Biafra separatism as 'a bid for re-inclusion by political actors excluded from power'. While some political actors may see in the Biafran agitation a route to power in the aftermath of the defeat of President Jonathan, who was popularly supported by the people of Southeast Nigeria, these arguments cannot explain the widespread agitations for Biafra under the Jonathan administration, as well as their systematic repression.

The political-economy explanation interprets the revival of Biafra separatism as a struggle by young people expressing resentment over their material condition – a condition which they face because of broader contradictions in the Nigerian political economy, but which they perceive as ethnic exclusion (Ibeau, 2015). This perspective connects the resurgence of Biafra separatism to contracting economic opportunities in Southeast Nigeria. The main argument of this perspective, therefore, is that Biafra separatism is a political expression of the economic frustrations of young people. These frustrations are, however, perceived by these agitators as resulting from the marginalisation of the Southeast in national life. Contracting economic

opportunities in the region, which have resulted in a very high level of unemployment even among highly educated young people, account for the proneness of the area to insecurity and separatist agitations (Smith, 2001). This is deepened by a perception that other parts of the country are unduly privileged by the federal government. It is widely acknowledged that groups are more likely to rebel when they feel disadvantaged vis-à-vis other groups in society (Gurr, 1970). On the other hand, studies point to insecurity as a major disincentive to the development of the previously buoyant regional economy, thus creating a vicious circle of insecurity, underdevelopment and separatist agitation (Ukiwo & Chukwuma, 2012).

From the perspective of state-society relations, the resurgence of Biafra separatism is traced to the nature of the interaction between the state and the society since 1999. Ukiwo (2009), for example, attributes the re-emergence of the Biafran separatist movement to the rise in state violence since the 1970s, while Onuoha (2011) focuses on the expansion of Nigeria's political space, after the country's transition to democracy in 1999. According to Onuoha (2011:404), the post-1999 Nigerian political environment is characterised by

the 'confrontation between state-led nationalism and state-seeking nationalism', in which the state-seeking nationalists are intensifying their struggle for alternative spaces and parallel structures of power.

Although existing explanations for the revival of Biafra separatism are not wrong, they are limited in many important ways. Firstly, they are historically selective, placing overwhelming emphasis on the period since 1999, thereby presenting an incomplete picture of Biafra separatism that neglects the links between the current agitation for Biafra and the previous experiences. Secondly, the ethnic competition argument, in particular, is overly elite-focused, neglecting the perspectives and autonomous actions of the masses (Odinkalu, 2015). The idea of ethnic mobilisation and manipulation does not account for several occasions in which agitation for Biafra was stoutly opposed by the Igbo elite, particularly under President Jonathan, who is now ironically posed as a symbol of the Biafran struggle. Thirdly, in as much as the economic deprivation explanation of Biafra separatism appears interesting, its claims

are not supported by empirical data. Although the development record of the Southeast region is, in some respects, worse than it was in previous decades, numerous studies have shown that the region performs at par with, or even better than, many other regions of Nigeria in the key areas of development such as education, health, job creation, provision of infrastructure, and poverty reduction (NPC and ICF, 2014; UNICEF, 2012; NBS, 2009).

There is no doubt that the factors suggested by existing explanations for the resurgence of Biafra separatism are at one time or the other present in the separatist agitations, yet we do not know why and how they result in organized agitations in the form of MASSOB, IPOB and the others. This is particularly important because similar factors have been present in the experiences of some other groups in Nigeria, but have not led to organised separatist agitations. Even more striking is that these factors have not always led to separatist agitations in 'Biafra'. In the following section, I will offer an alternative explanation for the persistence of Biafra separatism which tries to bring together relevant elements of the existing explanations into a comprehensive explanatory framework.

Persistence of Biafran Struggle: An Explanatory Framework

Evidence from the literature suggests that the explanation for the persistence of Biafran separatism can be found in the level of feeling of exclusion and collective victimization by the separatists (Harneit-Sievers, 2006; Ikpeze, 2000). The literature demonstrates that a sense of exclusion and proneness to collective victimisation correlates positively with conflicts and wars (Reuss & Prodohl,

1991). The main driver of Biafran separatist agitation is, therefore, the interaction between a sense of exclusion and feelings of collective victimisation. As represented in Table 1, periods when the sense of exclusion and feelings of collective victimisation are high tend to produce a high level of separatist agitation, while periods of a low sense of exclusion and feelings of collective victimisation tend to witness low levels of separatist agitation.

TABLE 1: MATRIX OF VICTIMISATION AND INCLUSION

SENSE OF EXCLUSION	FEELING OF COLLECTIVE VICTIMISATION	
	HIGH	LOW
	HIGH	Very high separatist agitation
LOW	High separatist agitation	Very low separatist agitation

The constantly swinging balance of a sense of exclusion and feelings of collective victimisation is related to what can be called Critical Moments (CM). *Critical Moments* are defined by social events or actions of 'historic' individuals or groups which can be used to mobilise or be mobilised into feelings of exclusion and collective victimisation, notwithstanding that only a very limited number of members of the group may be

affected. *Critical Moments* are emblematic of the individual experiences of members of the group; their high resonance enhances their mobilisation value. Elections stand out during *Critical Moments* in separatist agitations, especially in a state-dominant, ethnically divided country like Nigeria because they concretise all the hopes and fears of groups that perceive themselves as

collectively victimised. Other *Critical Moments* would include recurrent events in which members of a group suffer loss, death, or exclusion. With developments in communications, *Critical Moments* are more rampant and more capable of leading to separatist mobilisation.

One of the characteristics of a sense of collective victimhood is the tendency of the victims to project their predicaments as arising from interactions with outsiders. In other words, victim mentality forecloses the possibility of a genuine self-assessment. This explains the tendency of Biafra separatists to blame the federal government and other Nigerians for all the difficulties faced by the Igbo as a group rather than looking at how the Igbo as a community or the Igbo elite as a group might have contributed to or failed to ameliorate the situation. To be sure, the people of the Southeast, like other Nigerians, have lost confidence in local leaders, yet they do not focus their agitation against these leaders. Instead of seeing their problems as something caused from within, Biafra separatists prefer to attribute them to without, using each *Critical Moment* as a reference point to reinforce the perception of outsider-orchestrated victimisation.

Secondary evidence, which indicates that feelings of collective victimisation are critical in the Biafran separatist agitations, abounds in the literature. The evidence connects recurring separatist agitation to the Biafran war of 1967–1970, especially to the grievances that led to the outbreak of the war, grievances arising from how the war was fought and how the post-war settlement was implemented. That body of evidence strongly suggests that developments that occurred before, during and after the Biafran war engendered particularly deep grievances which have created a sense of collective suffering and collective victimhood among the Igbo (Osaghae, Onwudiwe & Suberu, 2002; Okafor, 2014; Bird & Ottanelli, 2011; Ibelema 2000). Biafra separatists hinge their struggle on the sense of exclusion and their victimhood experiences. As Achebe (1983: 45), a Biafra supporter, puts it:

Nigerians of all other ethnic groups will probably achieve consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo. . . . Modern Nigerian history has been marked by sporadic eruptions of the anti-Igbo feeling of more or less serious import, but it was not until 1966–7 when it swept through Northern Nigeria like 'a flood of deadly hate' that the Igbo

first questioned the concept of Nigeria.

Other Biafra separatists have tried to show that 'the Igbo is fundamentally rejected as a group – a group which, in consequence, rejected Nigeria itself' (Harneit-Sievers, 2006: 124–25). Various presentations and publications by the Igbo elite argue that the Igbo is fundamentally a rejected group (Ohaneze-Ndi-Igbo, 1999; Okeke, 1992; Okocha, 2006). They identify acts of victimisation against the Igbo to include physical harm, economic disempowerment, and political marginalisation. Three major factors have helped to sustain and reinforce a sense of victimhood among many Igbos, namely: 1) certain policies and actions of the Nigerian government which are perceived to disadvantage the group; 2) acts of violence seen to be targeting the group, and 3) the rhetoric of the Igbo elites as well as those of other Nigerians. Together, these factors along with the declining capacity of the Nigerian state are the underlying issues behind the persistence and upsurge in Biafran agitation.

Current Upsurge in Biafran Struggle

Since August 2020, there has been an upsurge in the Biafran separatist

agitation leading to widespread insecurity in the Southeast and more frequent violent encounters between the IPOB and security forces (Campbell, 2021). I argue that two key issues provide the basis for understanding the current momentum and escalation of the Biafran struggle, namely the perceived decline in the capacity of the Nigerian state and certain government actions and/or inactions that have rapidly increased the corps of willing agitators.

State capacity is one of the defining characteristics of any political system (Almond & Powell, 1966; Migdal, 1988). It refers to the ability of a government to administer its territory effectively (Skocpol, 1985). In theory, the survival and functioning of a political system depend on four basic state capacities: 1) extractive capacity – the ability to mobilise resources from the society to pursue what the central policymakers perceive as the 'national interest'; 2) regulative capacity – the ability to guide the national socio-economic and political development; 3) legitimization capacity – the ability to dominate the society by using symbols and creating consensus, and 4) coercive capacity – the ability to dominate by the use or threat of force (Almond & Powell, 1966).

These four capacities are conceptually distinct but interrelated in reality. For instance, the legitimisation of a regime is dependent on its performance. If the state can produce and deliver economic and social goods to the level of its citizens' expectations, or as its leaders promise, it should have no legitimacy problem. On the other hand, if the state apparatus cannot adequately drive economic development, this is likely to result in a decline in its legitimacy. With legitimisation capacity, the state can effectively govern its citizens without the necessity of constantly deploying coercion. Without legitimacy, however, the state would find it much more difficult to extract resources from society and would have to bear higher costs of governance (Habermas, 1975). A load of control problems would weaken the state's coercive capacity, which in turn would lower the expected cost of dissent. Of course, the decline of the four capacities rarely occurs simultaneously or in the same sequences in different cases. But their changes do tend to reinforce one another. Once the overall state capacity falls below a certain threshold, the regime would be in serious trouble, if not in danger of collapse.

Currently, Nigeria is experiencing a concurrent decline in all four aspects of

state capacity (Rotberg & Campbell, 2021; Pilling, 2022). Several indicators show that the country's capacity to drive national development has fallen to the lowest level since 1999. Similarly, Nigeria's capacity to mobilise and utilise resources for national development has been rather suboptimal. Furthermore, the state's capacity to maintain law and order has severely declined as the rising insecurity in the country exemplifies. The failure of security and governance in Nigeria has produced a corresponding decline in the state's legitimacy, making the state rely essentially on coercion to maintain law and order. But excessive reliance on the force has stretched Nigeria's security agencies and weakened the state's coercive capacity.

The weakened coercive capacity of the Nigerian state reflects in the multiple security challenges and the rising number of state-society encounters. Nigeria is currently grappling with generalised insecurity. The insurgency in the Northeast is worsened by banditry in the Northwest, criminality in the South-South, and communal/farmer-herder conflict across the country, especially in the North-Central. Alongside these low-intensity conflicts are the increasing incidents of violent state-society

encounters which the #EndSARS protest typifies.

The #EndSARS protest began on 8 October 2020 as a decentralised social movement and mass protest against police brutality in Nigeria. The goal of the protesters was to push for the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit of the Nigerian Police with a long record of abuses. The movement, which is dominated by young people, expanded to include demands for good governance. Whereas the #EndSARS protest commenced in Lagos as a largely peaceful movement, its spread across the country was followed by widespread violence including attacks on protesters, attacks on government facilities, especially food warehouses, police stations and prisons, and destruction of private property. It took several days before the security agencies could restore law and order. The challenges faced by the government in controlling #EndSARS protesters are indicative of the waning legitimisation and coercive capacities of the Nigerian state.

The cessation of the #EndSARS protest has, however, been trailed, especially in the Southeast region, by continued attacks on police stations and military checkpoints by the so-called 'unknown

gunmen'. These attacks, which increased after the formation of the ESN, the paramilitary arm of IPOB, are thought by some people to be the handiwork of ESN. It appears that IPOB is capitalising on the waning coercive capacity of the state to further delegitimise state authority by attacking security agencies and state institutions.

While the decline of the coercive capacity of the Nigerian state has lowered the cost of confronting the state and provided an opportunity for Biafra separatists to delegitimise state authority, a combination of factors linked to the feeling of victimhood and sense of exclusion by the people of Southeast Nigeria has led to the rapid expansion of the corps of willing Biafran agitators, making the IPOB more formidable. The first is the perceived attitude of successive governments towards the people of the Southeast. Many people in the Southeast believe that past and present Nigerian leaders have been insensitive to the needs and aspirations of the people of the region. They accuse President Muhammadu Buhari, in particular, of showing deep-seated disdain for the people. For Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the apex socio-cultural organisation in the region, 'Mr President's actions, policies and utterances negate

the principle of fairness, justice and equity, which is not good for a leader' (as cited in Njoku, 2016). Alleged acts of injustice by President Buhari against the people of Southeast include marginalisation, especially in the appointment to federal government positions.

President Buhari is further accused of failing to address conflicts between farmers and herders which have led to the loss of lives and property in many Southeast communities. Since the emergence of President Buhari in 2015, the destructive activities of rogue herdsmen in the Southeast have increased rapidly (Okoli et al., 2020). In this situation, President Buhari is perceived to have shown a lack of capacity, or even willingness, to end the intensifying conflict. According to Amnesty International (2018), 'our research shows that these attacks were well planned and coordinated, with the use of weapons like machine guns and AK-47 rifles. Yet, little has been done by the authorities in terms of prevention, arrests and prosecutions, even when information about the suspected perpetrators was available'.

As the killings persist, the people of the Southeast are left to weave destructive

conspiracy theories to explain the conflict. There have been allegations of a repeat of the 1966 ethnic cleansing, and even genocide, by the herders (Korieh, 2013). Widespread disenchantment with President Muhammadu Buhari, who is viewed as soft on the herders, has pushed communities to engage in self-defence (Okoli, 2016). Under this circumstance, some youths have organised on the platform of ESN or local vigilante groups to secure their communities. While striving to protect their communities, these youths have become radicalised and integrated into the wider Biafran struggle.

The government's militant tactics in dealing with the Biafran struggle have further radicalised the agitators and forced individuals who would have otherwise been neutral to join the struggle. There is substantial evidence that Nigerian authorities have deployed excessive force, including killings, incarceration, and harassment, in dealing with the separatist agitators. A report by Journalist, Emmanuel Mayah (2016), indicates that between August 2015 and February 2016, about 170 unarmed citizens were shot dead or critically injured while about 400 others were arrested, charged or detained without trial. In May 2008, MASSOB published

the names of 2,020 of its members that had allegedly been killed by the authorities since 1999 (Onyekamuo, 2008). In January 2013, fifty bodies believed to be Biafra supporters were found afloat in the Ezu River in Anambra State (Mamah, Ujumadu & Balogun, 2013). In 2016, Amnesty International (2016) issued a report detailing how Nigerian security forces killed at least 40 unarmed people and injured more than 50 others in an operation conducted between 29 and 30 May 2016 apparently to prevent a march by IPOB members ahead of pro-Biafran commemoration events in Onitsha, Anambra State. Events such as the Onitsha killings highlight the degree of rights violations associated with the Biafran struggle. These killings question Nigeria's willingness to respect its international human rights commitments, which require, among other things, the protection of the right to peaceful assembly and association, the right to freedom of expression, as well as the requirement that law enforcement officials must, as far as possible, apply non-violent means.

Finally, the expansion of the corps of willing agitators and the intensification of the Biafran struggle have a cultural dimension which involves an increasing breakdown of existing forms of inter-

generational relationships (Onuoha, 2013). Since the 1970s, the 'Igbo cause' has been championed by elite-led organisations formed by the 'older generation', seeking greater inclusion in Nigerian politics and society. However, with the rise of radical-separatist groups since 1999, existing forms of cultural and inter-generational relations are being redefined. Mainstream organisations, such as Ohaneze-Ndi-Igbo and Aka Ikenga, have declined as, if not ceased to be, the dominant voice that speaks for the entire group. As Onuoha (2014:3) observed, radical youth movements like IPOB are 'currently upturning, recreating and challenging certain traditional norms of power and authority which are vested in elite-led Igbo organisations like the Ohanaeze-Ndi-Igbo'. In this way, the youth organisations have become more relevant and attracted wide followership by appealing to young people. The growth of radical youth-led separatist groups feeds into the broader Nigerian context where youth-based groups and youth-led revolts currently play a critical role in Nigeria's political process, with far-reaching implications for the exercise of power and authority, social cohesion, and peacebuilding (Obi, 2006; Nolte, 2004; Adebanwi, 2005).

Conclusion: Prospects for Peace

There are no positive prospects for peaceful resolution of the Biafran separatist conflict. Although the conflict has not progressed into a full-scale war yet, the potential for such developments is present. Deadly separatist rebellions are known for their durability, severity, resistance to a negotiated settlement, influence of strong local identity, and external intervention (Tan, 2001: 268). The Biafran struggle exhibits all of these undesirable attributes. The conflict has been characterised by persistence, resistance to a negotiated settlement, and growing severity. Moreover, there is an external dimension, in the form of relatively strong support from sympathisers abroad, mostly the Igbo diaspora. More significantly, increasing anger over the perceived exclusion of the Southeast in federal politics and the brutal repression of Biafra supporters make the struggle resonate with wide sections of people in the region, including students, peasants, the unemployed, professionals, community leaders, and even religious leaders. Beyond deployment of force against Biafra supporters, the Nigerian government seems unclear about how it intends to deal with the conflict.

Peaceful resolution of the Biafran struggle requires dealing with the underlying grievances of the people of the Southeast. But much depends on the ability of both sides to come to a compromise – to give peace a chance. There is therefore a need for an innovative peacebuilding strategy that goes beyond a fixed set of procedures and practices. Policymakers may have to think through at least three major peacebuilding approaches in dealing with the Biafran separatist struggle, namely liberal governance, stabilisation, and social justice (Curtis, 2013). Peacebuilding through liberal governance focuses on strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and good governance. It also has a strong emphasis on social and economic development. Under this approach, peacebuilding consists of activities and initiatives to help bring about and facilitate liberal governance. Specific measures that can be considered under this approach include constitutional, legal, and economic reforms, as well as measures to build institutions at the local level. The problem with this approach is that it might not be well suited to accommodate the desires and expectations of radical separatists who might prefer measures that would produce immediate change.

Furthermore, the process of reform in itself may trigger new forms of conflicts rather than reinforce structures of peace.

Peacebuilding through stabilisation is concerned with maintaining international peace and security by upholding order and stability within states. The approach emphasises the strengthening of the state's military and policing capacity and consolidating state authority. In other words, stabilisation relies heavily on coercion and the building of the coercive capacity of the state, thereby perceiving increased militarisation of conflicts as peacebuilding. Whereas peacebuilding as stabilisation emphasises the control of violent expression of dissent or identities, it focuses less on conflict transformation. At present, stabilisation appears to be the Nigerian government's preferred approach for dealing with the Biafran struggle.

Finally, peacebuilding as social justice sees conflicts as problems that can be addressed through programmes that 'encourage inclusive access to resources and institutions, to empower marginalised groups, to end all forms of discrimination against disadvantaged groups, and to redistribute income and land ownership' (Curtis, 2013: 14). The

social-justice approach to peacebuilding does not only intend to stop direct violence but seeks to address the structural issues that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. Addressing structural issues underlying conflicts requires a systemic transformation of relationships in the affected society's political, economic and social policies. Social justice in the peacebuilding context involves acts such as reparation or compensation for damage inflicted, restoration for past losses, moral and political restitution, social, economic and cultural restructuring, as well as sharing of power, responsibility and resources.

Considering the nature of the grievances underlying the Biafran separatist struggle, the social-justice approach to peacebuilding appears to be the most plausible way of addressing the problem. To be sure, some elements of liberal peacebuilding like constitutional and legal reforms might be required; however, an approach that addresses the psychosocial and emotional issues relating to the conflict is critical. In this direction, five main lines of action are suggested:

1. The Nigerian government should establish an independent commission of inquiry to conduct a transparent,

comprehensive, and impartial investigation into alleged unlawful killings and other human rights abuses of Biafra supporters. The Commission should include, among others, representatives of the pro-Biafra groups such as MASSOB and IPOB, international and national human rights groups, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Killings. The investigation should determine: a) the identity of all those that were allegedly killed or abused, and the circumstances under which their human rights were violated, and b) the identity of those that were directly involved in the killings and abuses, and the circumstances under which the alleged violations of human rights were carried out.

2. The Nigerian government should prosecute without delay and in accordance with international fair trial standards all those implicated in the killing and abuse of human rights of Biafra supporters.
3. The Nigerian government should set up a high-level Peace and Reconciliation Commission to engage with pro-Biafra groups to devise an effective approach to the resolution of the agitation for Biafra. The

Commission should undertake consultations with state governments and other relevant stakeholders to encourage them to buy into the peace initiative and identify the specific role they would play in the reconciliation process. The core objectives of the Commission should include: a) to provide a platform for pro-Biafra groups to express their grievances, and for the government to channel them to the appropriate quarters for redress; b) to relate the relevant grievances to the government's reform programme, including legal and constitutional reforms; c) to develop a compendium of quick intervention measures by different actors, including federal, state, and local governments, to address the grievances underlying the agitation for Biafra, and d) to formulate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating how redressive measures recommended are implemented.

4. To support the process of reconciliation, the Nigerian government should tone down its rhetoric about the use of force against Biafran agitators, apply force with utmost restraint and only in extreme situations, and prosecute violent

- protesters according to the due process of law.
5. The governments and leaders of the Southeast states should establish an economic revitalisation scheme that would complement the interventions by the federal government and other stakeholders. As the first step in this direction, platforms on which Southeast leaders could meet and undertake consultation, such as the Southeast Governors' Forum, Southeast Legislators' Forum, and the

Southeast Traditional Rulers Council, should be established, revived or strengthened. Furthermore, promising economic initiatives, such as the Southeast Nigeria Economic Commission (SENEC), should be revisited and actualised. The governments of the Southeast states should as a matter of urgency come up with realistic job creation plans, including measures geared towards improving the investment climate of the region to attract private sector enterprises.

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