Pro-Biafran Activists and the call for a Referendum: A Sentiment Analysis of 'Biafraexit' on Twitter after UK's vote to leave the European Union

Emmanuel Sunday Nwofe[1]
School of Media, Design and Technology, University of Bradford, England, United Kingdom

In a society bonded by a concatenation of diverse ethno-nationalism, the struggle for inclusion and exclusion becomes particularly unavoidable. Common among the findings of researchers of ethnic identities is the potential for conflicts when inequalities and injustices, rooted in ethnicity and religious identities are the basis for allocation of powers and resources. This is more threatening when a particular ethnic group is signposted as a threat to other group and targeted for ill-treatment. In Nigeria, the Igbo ethnic group is characterized as an endangered group and has risen at one point to challenge inequalities, injustices and state-orchestrated violence against the ethnic society that led to Nigeria-Biafra war between 1967 and 1970. Fifty years after the war, the Igbo ethnic society is still grappling to be included in the Nigeria nation-building project. The implication is a deep-rooted grievance among the Igbo ethnic group that the wave of campaigns and social movement for the restoration of Biafra continued to reverberate in recent times. After the UK's 'Brexit' vote, the pro-Biafra activists launched 'Biafraexit' on Twitter in the style of 'Brexit' for a referendum to exit Nigeria. The purpose of this paper is to examine the major sentiment of the people about the Biafra restoration 50 years after the Biafran war. Through a sentiment analysis of 'Biafraexit', 'free Biafra' hashtags and the 'Biafra' search term on Twitter, the paper examines to what extent the perception of insecurity of lives of the Igbos constitute major concern of proponents of Biafran independent on Twitter? How have the human right abuses of pro-Biafra activists under President Buhari's rule facilitated feelings of insecurity, religious cleansing and Islamization among pro-Biafra activists? The implications of this for cohesive nation-building are discussed.
Keywords: Biafra; Biafraexit; Self-determination; Identity politics; ethnic hatred; Nigeria; state violence; insecurity.

Introduction

The UK's 'Brexit' vote in June 2016 attracted an upsurge of assorted varieties of identity politics and neoliberal movements across the world. From anti-immigration resentment, ethnic landscapes, multiculturalism, anti-globalization, national identity and "sense of localized place", 'Brexit' triggered a global interest in Indigenous ideology that manifested in what scholars calls "national populism" (Gusterson, 2017), "cultural nationalism" (Evans, 2017), "place-based identity" (Cramer, 2016) or anti-cultural pluralism (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2016). The election of Donald Trump in the United State is a good example of this upsurge and shows how the rhetoric of protectionism, identity politics and aggressive nationalism are finding a bigger audience within a western democracy. 'Brexit' reverberated the full force of European anti-establishment parties.

According to a survey carried by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) after 'Brexit' vote, a number of insurgent parties across EU were determined to push for at least 34 referenda in the coming years on various issues such as EU membership, Eurozone membership and refugee relocation quotas (Dennison & Pardijs, 2016, p.1).

From the Scottish National party craving for a second independent referendum to Sinn Fein advocating for a vote on reunifying Ireland and Northern Ireland; the rest of the EU also felt the impact of 'Brexit' vote. Within hours of the UK's decision, the news had been welcomed by anti-establishment political movements such as the Front National in France, the Far-Right Alternative for Germany (AFD), PVV in the Netherlands; Lega Nord in Italy; FPO in Austria, all calling for the referendum to be emulated in their countries (Orange, 2016). In the style of 'Brexit', the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria also launched 'Biafraexit' on Twitter as a tag to Biafrans' exit from Nigeria through a weapon of a referendum (Okolie, 2017).

Apart from the election of Donald Trump, other manifestations of identity politics include the December 2016 votes in the Italian referendum to reject constitutional reform (Gusterson, 2017). Although, Marine Le Pen's anti-immigration National Front Party in France and Norbert Hofer of the Freedom Party of Austria may have lost their elections, the unprecedented popularity of their campaign

messages gave rise to a new form of "authoritarian nationalism" that further emphasized the perception of "self" and "others" (Conversation, 2017). It is about global nativism – a concept that is explicitly about preserving the purity of an "indigenous" people's culture against the threat of cosmopolitanism and unsavoury barbarian invaders. It is about people's consciousness to distinct community values that strengthens their collective primordialism (Cramer, 2016) or what Ahmed (2016) calls "ethnolinguistic vitality".

It is instructive to note that modern societies are increasingly characterized by multi-group diversity and managing this diversity have become a cardinal focus of scientific research. Two leading theoretical argument have trailed the debate on ethnicity – the primordialist and instrumentalist.

The primordialist interpret ethnicity and ethnic identity in terms of human genetic make-up (Westin, Bastos, & Dahinden, 2010); that is, the bond between individuals in a group "from given of birth – 'blood', language, religion, territory and culture" (Jones, 1997 as cited in Ahmed, 2016, P.2). The primordialist assume that ethnic identities are deeply rooted effective ties that shape primary loyalties and affinities (Yashar, 1998).

In the context of the growing global concept of nativism (expressed in 'Brexit' decision and Trump election) and the growing neo-independent movements, all actors possess a strong sense of ethnic or racial identity that primarily shapes their actions and world-view. As such individuals and communities commonly advance and/or defend ethnically derived concern, particularly when they perceive a disadvantage or (in the case of 'Brexit') united by anti-globalization forces or what Godwin and Heat calls "left behind" voters – a social group that are united by a general "sense of insecurity, pessimisms and marginalisation" (Goodwin & Heath, 2016, p. 331).

The reverberation of the campaign for the restoration of Biafra by pro-Biafran activists and the wave of protests therein are therefore understood as a natural expression of integral ethnic identities. However, Yashar (1998) criticised primordial argument for failure to problematize the condition under which the existence of deep-rooted identities become politically salient and engender political organisations.

The instrumentalist challenged primordialist and argue that individuals have (general political and material) preferences and thus tend to engage in "utility-maximizing" behaviour (Yashar, 1998, p. 28). Thus ethnic identities are viewed in the perspective of its mediation to social relations and its deployment to negotiate access to "primary economic and political resources" (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007 as cited in Ahmed, 2016, p. 2). In other words, the emphasis is shifted from why ethnicity become salient to how political entrepreneurs mobilize and politicize ethnic groups to pursue (personal) political/ and economic end (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Yashar, 1998).

However, in relations to the emerging nationalist populism in the western democracies, the primordial position can be said to be closer to popular conceptions and explanations of group cohesiveness, while the instrumental position is more consonant with the views held by political elites (Westin et al., 2010).

Thinking about ethnic identities in Africa, research both in academic and mainstream suggests that some policies of colonial administration in Africa institutionalized a dichotomous political system that made the struggle for ethnic identities inevitable (Alubo, 2004; Canci & Odukoya, 2016; Osaghae, 2003; Sjögren, 2015; Ukiwo, 2005). Markedly, Nigeria is characterised as a deeply divided state in which political issues are vigorously contested along the lines of ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. The issues in contention bother on the fundamental existence and legitimacy of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt "exclusionary and winner-take-all strategies" (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005, p. 5). These include control of state power, resource allocation and citizenship.

The amalgamation of 1914, which bonded ethnic, cultural and religiously diverse people together, only provided a fertile environment for people to mobilize the instrument of ethnic identities to maintain collective demands for fair treatments within the country. Phinney et al see ethnic identity as "embracing various aspects, including self-identification, feelings of belongingness and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one's own ethnic group" (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001, p.496). Referring to subgroups within a larger context, such as a nation, ethnic identity is a claim to common ancestry with a persisting sense of common interest based on the combination of historical experience and valued cultural trait (Harff & Gurr, 2004). This valued cultural trait includes belief, language, ways of life, and a common homeland.

In Nigeria, ethnicity is a real matter for social calculation and negotiation (Aydin & Lafer, 2015; Igwara, 2001).Thus people first identify with their ethnic groups before identifying with Nigeria (Ukiwo, 2005). Looking at ethnicity from the perspective of colonial creation, Ukiwo argues that the policies of indirect rule, categorization of Africans by tribes and promotion of settlements between native and settlers in urban centers tended to create the consciousness of cultural nativism that led to the rise, spread and consolidation of ethnic competition in Africa and Nigeria in particular. He

suggested that this culminated in "socio-economic competition, regional inequalities, lack of economic unity, rivalry in the provision of amenities, low-class consciousness, intemperate utterances and factional politics" (Nnoli, 1978 as cited in Ukiwo, 2005, p. 13). The identity struggle in Nigeria is now heated up to the extent that a certain ethnic group defile constitutional provisions to issue a quite notice to other ethnic group living in their region (Abati, 2017). Where a country is characterized by multi-group identities, "actors use formal and informal resources to recreate and justify the scope and scale of territorial demarcations, as well as the political identities and authority structures linked to each" (Sjögren, 2015, p. 164). Shah, Suliman, Ullah & Jamal (2016) note that ethnoreligious bifurcations of society create different strata's or groups. This division "benefit the majority *ethnic group* and policies are devised only for their interest protection, directly or indirectly push the marginalized and vulnerable people toward inequality and social exclusion" (Shah, 2016, p. 12 mine in the italics).

Unfortunately for Nigeria, successive governments after independence could not dismantle these fundamental errors, what is referred to as 'the mistake of 1914', in order to build a cohesive Nigeria characterized by a common ideology of nationhood. Instead, politicians continued to foster this dichotomous state structure that continued to institutionalize inequality, stereotyping and ethnoreligious discrimination.

By virtue of its complex web of salient identities and chronic history of conflict, Nigeria can be described as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa (Okpanachi, 2010; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). From its inception as a colonial creation, Nigeria has suffered perennial crises of territorial or state legitimacy, which often challenged her efforts at national cohesion. The high point of the crises is the Nigerian-Biafran war of the 1960s, in which the Igbos, one of the major ethnic groups, sought (unsuccessfully) to secede from Nigeria in response to a persisting and senseless killing of their ethnic members residing in the northern region of the country. Since post-war Nigeria, disintegration continues to be contemplated by the Igbo as one possible way of resolving the 'National Question' (Onuoha, 2013a).

Drawing on the memories of the Nigerian-Biafran war and post-war Nigeria, the Igbo has continued to cry for marginalization fifty years after. Although there was a 'no victor no vanquished' designation by the then Federal Military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, in a bid to reabsorb the Igbo ethnic group into Nigeria, post-war events indicate that "the former Biafrans, particularly the dominant Igbo ethnic group were reabsorbed into Nigeria as conquered people" (Duruji, 2009, p. 55). Duruji identified some major policies that were calculated to stifle and demobilize the capacity of the Igbo to make any productive engagement in Nigeria. They include the 20-pound ceiling placed on bank lodgements for every Igbo after the war no matter how much such persons had in banks; the timing of indigenization policy which comes shortly after the war when the Igbos were financially constrained to participate, thereby incapacitating the Igbos economically. Other strategies of marginalization were the deficient infrastructural development in their homeland which resulted in mass migration of the Igbos to other areas of the country for economic survival (Duruji, 2009, pp. 55-56). The Igbo ethnic group is also regarded and treated suspiciously, are stigmatized and targeted for ill-treatment (Abati, 2017; Nnamani, 2016). Fifty years later, the homeland of Eastern Nigeria is still redolent of the same marginalisation rhetoric, including stagnated infrastructural development, political subjugation, religious domination, insecurity of lives and property, and deep rooted hatred from other ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa-Fulani. The result is the manifestation of a number of groups who now opposed this professed marginalization.

According to the President of Ohaneze Ndigbo, the highest pan-Igbo organisation in Nigeria, ethnic hatred of the Igbo pervades over the northern region that they now give the Igbos an ultimatum to relocate from their region within 90 days. They have appeared to "thinks of Nigeria as an empire" (J.N. Nwodo, personal communication, June 12, 2017).

The re-emergence of old hatreds that appears to lay dormant for decades are now strong amongst ethnic groups in Nigeria. Agitation for an independent Biafra is apparently a response to these sense of fear and domination with a collective optimism that a new Biafra will bring opportunities and freedom. The fear is aroused and magnified by historical ethnic conflict in which the Igbo has suffered pogrom – historical experience that is alive in collective (and to some degree personal) memories; considering recent events in which pro-Biafran protesters were killed by the military (Amnesty International, 2016a).

There is fear of annihilation and, again, a sense of opportunity (e.g. to create a better Biafra where freedom, equality, justice and cultural values are maintained) is fed by collective dreams that go back many generations. A vision of opportunity that consolidates their "ethnolinguistic vitality" (Ahmed, 2016, p. 3) – that which makes them think of themselves as a resourceful, distinctive, progressive and collective entity within the Nigerian society. Kelman (1997) writes that these fears of annihilation and this quest for domination are "the proximate consequences of a process of liberation

for people (or peoples) emerging from a recent and often extended history of repression, oppression, and subjugation. They are integrally linked to a process of national self-determination" (Kelman, 1997, p. 326).

While marginalisation and subjugation of the Igbos in the national political project have been found to be a major reason for persistent cries for self-rule by the pro-Biafra activists (Aydin, 2013a; Duruji, 2009), new evidence, we argue here, is that state direct or indirect institutionalized violence against those who peacefully agitate for Biafra as well as the flagrant display of hate, stigmatization, stereotype and discrimination increasingly and unconsciously awakened in the younger generations of the Igbo that a restoration of Biafra would be a solution, hence the call for a referendum. The inability of the government to take proactive actions against security agencies who played a major role in these activities of violence also suggest to them a conspiracy to annihilate them.

Again, the inability of the Nigerian government to arrest and prosecute Fulani herdsmen who are killing people in communities inhabited by predominantly Christians across the country has raised concerns about religious freedom and domination in the country that seems to support agitation for Biafra nation (Aydin, 2013b). These feeling of dejection and insecurity in Nigeria, to a certain degree, mobilized a new sense of Biafra in which people who are affected by the incompetents of Nigerian leadership now use Biafra as a metaphor to voice their resentment (Nwachukwu, 2017; Okonta, 2014). There is a belief among proponents of 'Biafraexit' referendum that the UK's support for a referendum in Nigeria will potentially heal the wound of hurts and genocide they committed against the Indigenous people of Biafra during the Nigerian-Biafran war of 196os (Okolie, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the major sentiment of the people about the Biafran restoration 50 years after the Biafran war. Through a sentiment analysis of 'Biafraexit', 'free Biafra' hashtags and the 'Biafra' internet search term on Twitter, the paper examines to what extent does the perception of insecurity of lives of the Igbos constitute major concern of pro-Biafran supporters on Twitter? (RQ1). How have the state institutionalized killings of Igbos, particularly the human right abuses of pro-Biafra activists under President Buhari's government, facilitate feelings of religious hegemony and ethnic cleansing among pro-Biafra activists? (RQ2).

Materials and Methods

In this era of data-driven journalism, researchers have adopted different methods of examining how people think about events or issues making headlines. One of these methods consists of extracting social media text for sentiment analysis. Software engineers and analysts are producing tools that help track these sentiments in real time on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube. We collected our data for a period of two weeks following the announcement of 'Brexit' result. This was done by a search for hashtags such 'Biafraexit', 'freebiafra' and a term 'Biafra' on Twitter using an R-Studio application software.

Important public opinions and reaction is sentiment, which describes whether people feel positive, negative and neutral towards an event and how this change over time. Our working assumption is that we can approximate the prevalent feelings of pro-Biafra agitators by measuring the emotional content of the words used in the discussion of the event. The decision to track the opinion and sentiments of people about Biafra is informed by the wave of agitation for Biafra in recent time that has led to a monumental loss of lives.

We assume that the best way of solving a problem is to identify issues causing it, thus a representative of issues causing pro-Biafra agitation will suggest some ways in which Nigeria's unity could be reconsidered. Ethnic disharmony has gravitated to colossal loss of national loyalty, increase in hatred and geo-ethnic discrimination in Nigeria. We hope to contribute to solving these problems by providing an initial result for assessing people's opinions and sentiments. Opinion and sentiments constitute a huge insight for understanding social problems, people's interest and attitude in order for the government to plan and negotiate pathways for fostering national peace and development, justifying the rationale for the study. Our methodology comprises three stages: (1) the text collection and cleaning stage; (2) pre-processing; (3) sentiment analysis.

Text Collection and Cleaning

Social media companies have created Application Programme Interfaces (APIs) that share data. We extracted texts from Twitter API using 'Biafrexit', 'FreeBiafra' hashtags and a search term 'Biafra' on an R-Studio Application tool, window Version 0.99.902.0. Twitter APIs consist of "Representational State Transfer (REST) and Streaming APIs". The REST API offers methods for authenticating applications, processing requests and handling imposed limits. The Streaming API provides the client application with the Twitter global stream (public, user and site) of data (Isah, Trundle, & Neagu, 2014). The framework enables the search and extraction of Tweets and stores them

in JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) format. Because the collected text is noisy, methods for cleaning and parsing of data to form a corpus, i.e. a collection of comments and tweets are incorporated for further processing, producing 12715 actual observation.

Pre-processing

This is a stage where the corpus is tokenized into feature vectors. We adopted the traditional representation of documents known as 'bag of words' described in (Shafiei et al., 2007) and applied in (Isah et al., 2014) because of its simplicity. The bag of word considers every document as a vector in a very high dimensional space; "each element of this vector corresponds to one word (or, more generally, feature) in the document collection" (Shafiei et al., 2007, p. 770).

We adapted a simple feature selection method to transform the text stream to words; involving the task of removing delimiters, converting all words to lowercase, removing numbers and stop words, stemming words to their base and some domain specific feature transformations. The token is then represented as a bag of words sparse matrix using the term frequency-inverse document frequency ($tf - idf$) scheme described in (Shafiei et al., 2007) which combines the term frequency and document frequency.

We defined our corpus as C, containing N documents defined as di, where $i = 1 \dots N$. The ($tf - idf$) scheme considers the relative importance of words in the document and assigns to term t a weight in document d given by:

$$tf - idf_{t,d} = tf_{t,d} \, X \, idf_t \qquad (1)$$

Where:

$tf_{t,d}$ denotes term frequency, the number of word occurrences in a document;

$idf_t = log \frac{N}{df_t}$ denotes inverse document frequency, and

df_t represents the number of documents containing the word.

Sentiment Analysis Stage

This stage deals with polarity measurement, sentiment and emotional classification. We clustered the entire corpus and employed the lexicon based sentiment classification to measure polarity. According to (Hu & Liu, 2004 as cited in Isah et al., 2014), this approach merges two-lexicon, consisting of "application or domain specific reassembled lexicon and a generic English based lexicon". We applied sentiment scoring function, which compares all the words in the corpus to the words in the lexicon. The overall sentiment scores of the corpus are then used to determine the difference between the numbers of positively and negatively assigned word. A random review of polarity score is presented in Figure.1.

Score	Tweet
-1	yoruba man threatens fire we will kill igbos in lagos abuja kaduna then biafraland didnt dss pick man till now
3	support free biafrasupport free nnamdi kanu stop sharia muslim buhari
0	femi aribisala nigeria cannot survive without the igbos must read via thetrentonline
-1	petition urge nigerian government stop massacre igbos
0	biafra last hope humanity nigeria must allow us go
-1	nigeria has expired and its government islawlessamp
-2	we ve come restore biafra no amount genocide massacres hitler buhari d zoo head will stop us
-4	williemobiano mass killer anywhere u see shoot dead he must perish he killed 1000s biafransipob freebiafra
-2	"since biafran genocide nigeria continued starve children death
-1	iâ€™ll kill all igboâ€™s including my wife before they getâ biafra
-3	thewhistleng fulani herdsmen killing us home boko haram killing us north foreigns killing us abroad we want Biafra
2	mayoroflondon please tell muslimbrotherbuhari stop secret killings biafranyouths free nnamdikanu support biafraexit
1	amnestysvizzera buhari orders military crush unarmed peaceful protestersipob free nnamdikanu biafra
-2	unhumanrights buhari ordered secret killers army uniform killing innocent biafrans extrajudicially freennamdikanu Biafra

Figure 1. *Random review of Polarity score*

Therefore the associated polarity score for each tweet in the corpus is given by:

$$Score = \sum_n^i pw - \sum_j^m nw \qquad (2)$$

Where pw and nw denotes positive and negative words respectively;

A tweet has an overall positive sentiment if score > 0,

A tweet has an overall neutral sentiment if score = 0,

A tweet has an overall negative sentiment if score is < 0

The total score for the corpus is visualized and evaluated with simple descriptive statistics –histogram – in Figure 2.
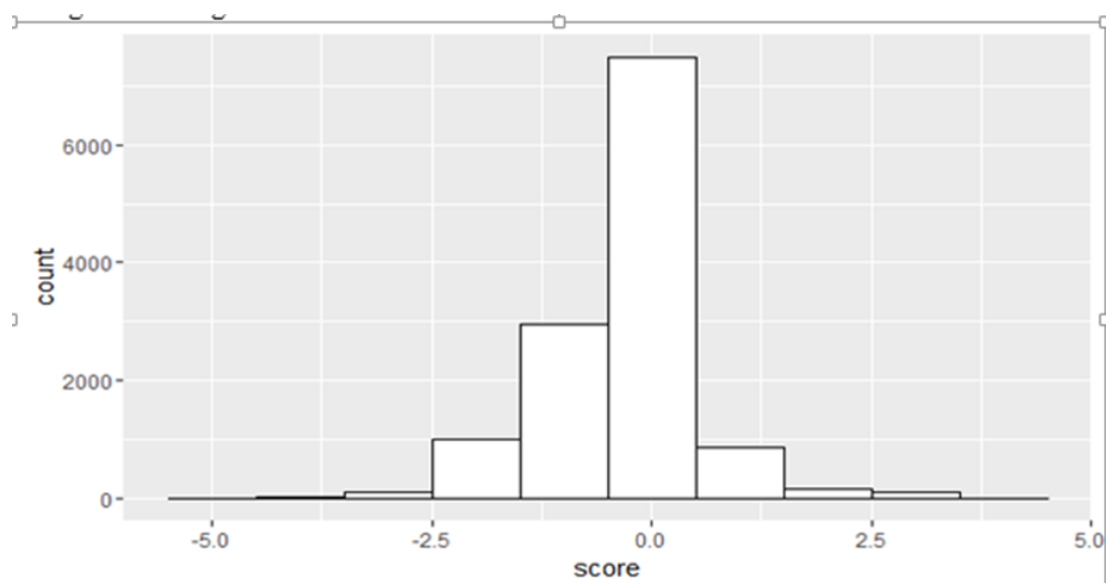
Figure 2. *Overall sentiment scores for the entire document.*

Results

While the main objective of this paper is to understand major issue (s) or sentiment that pro-Biafran supporters have raised as to why they wished to have a referendum in the style of 'Brexit', we also sort to know the extent to which perception of insecurity of lives of Igbos continues to constitute major concern of pro-Biafran supporters on Twitter over political marginalisation? (RQ1). By insecurity in this paper, we mean any form of uneasiness or phobia regarding whether the state has the ability to protect lives and property, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of religious worship and ability to obtain justice in a way that is fair and equal with another ethnic group in the country.

In line with this, we first determined the most highlighted word by obtaining the frequencies of words through a word cloud (see figure 3). Using the R-Studio application software, we cleaned and converted the text into a single corpus, with each Tweet represented as a single document. The result produced 12715 documents making up the corpus. The corpus is represented as a sparse matrix for frequency term analysis, thus created a data frame with words and their frequencies as shown in Figure 4. We did not include words which did not appear up to 200 times.

Figure 3. *Word cloud showing words which appeared not less than 200 times.*

Word	Freq
Biafra	10440
Biafraexit	5252
Nigeria	4672
Buhari	3939
Freebiafra	3774
Fulani	2510
Support	1999
Stop	1860
Tribes	1798
Biafran	1726
Warn	1702
Islamisation	1608
Jihad	1608
Hausa	1598

Figure 4. *Sample overview of words and frequencies.*

The result showed a preponderance of terms associated with fear of ethnoreligious hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim north and emphasized a narrative of past memories in which the perception of genocide, ethnoreligious domination and extermination of the Igbo hold precedence. Looking at the word cloud, the spotlight is on *genocide, jihad, Islamisation, tribe, stop, forcing*, etc. You can also see words such as *killer, killing, death, massacre, Fulani herdsmen, starving and freedom*. This suggests how memories of ethnic and religious conflict in which many Igbo populations lost their lives in the north became a major reference point.

Against the backdrop of the struggle to legitimize Sharia law as a guiding principle of state policy, religious identities have served a prominent and stable source of identity and conflict in Nigeria (Canci & Odukoya, 2016; Okpanachi, 2010). In the Hausa-Fulani north, religious identity is more pronounced than ethnic identity and serves to stimulate ethnicity (Canci & Odukoya, 2016; Ozfidan, & Ugurlu, 2015). Amongst the three dominant religious identities in Nigeria: Christian, Islam, and traditional religion, Christian and Islam has remained the backbone of religious diversity and conflicts, thus stimulated north-south cleavages (in terms of the north being dominated by Muslim and the south predominantly Christians). The intensity of religious identities in Nigeria is found to be one of the highest in the world; as Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of religion than any other identity (Paden, 2008 as cited in Okpanachi, 2010, p. 7). Paden noted that the all-consuming nature of Islamic identity does eclipse other identities that religious differences are contrived to negotiate ethnic identities.

In reference to the above, the quest for ethnic nationalism, especially the Biafra self-determination movement, resonate within the reality of religious differences that sometimes result in ethnic crises. The religious intolerance of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim north has meant that some actions of other ethnic groups are evaluated in terms of Islamic correctness. The ease at which Christians can be killed on an allegation of blasphemy attests to this.

Historically, the Igbo population in the north had always fallen victim of ethnoreligious attacks and there is this collective perception that the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group (which has taken control of governance for decades) indirectly encourage these attacks as a way to not only maintain their "cultural nationalism" (Evans, 2017) over other groups but also to ensure that the Igbo ethnic group does not reinforce what Ahmed (2016) describes as "ethnolinguistic vitality" in their region. Consequently, any action of criminality linked to Hausa-Fulani (for example, the Fulani herdsmen attacks) is interpreted in terms of religion and ethnic differentiation, especially where it does appear the body language of the Fulani kinsmen (including the President) do not obviously suggest otherwise.

In the light of the foregoing, the highlight on 'genocide' as one of the highly used word in the word cloud suggests that killing of unarmed pro-Biafra activists by security agencies and the unwavering attacks on Christian dominated communities by Fulani-herdsmen, amidst lack of interest to prosecute offenders by government, reinvent the narratives of the past in which the Igbo has suffered similar fate. It reinvigorates the Biafra war years and the propaganda of genocide.

The argument about genocide has always played a central role in negotiating Biafran identity and self-determination agenda. During the Biafra war, belief in Nigeria's genocidal intentions became a central object of Biafran nationalism and drew on both distorted representations of Nigeria and on historical analogies with the Nazi genocide against the Jews, as a way to secure the support of Biafrans to Biafran struggle (Anthony, 2014; Doron, 2014; Heerten & Moses, 2014). This strategy still characterizes the rhetoric of emerging pro-Biafra campaigners due to the inability of the Nigerian state to manage key aspects of national questions (Onuoha, 2013a). One main reason given by Biafran officials as to why self-determination was sort in 1967 was the inability of the Nigerian state to protect lives and properties of Easterners across the country. And since the Nigerian state has proved unable and unwilling to protect residents of eastern Nigeria and accord them full democratic rights, their loyalties were forfeited. According to a Biafran journalist, Simon Ibekwe, "when the Nigerians violated our basic human rights and liberties, we decided reluctantly but bravely to found our own state, to exercise our inalienable right to self-determination as our only remaining hope for survival as a people" (Simpson, 2014, p. 341). The Recent militarization of pro-Biafra activists by Nigerian government renewed the argument about genocide and religious cleansing in the debate about 'neo-Biafranism'.

Significantly, Table 2 shows 14 most frequent words and among them are, *Buhari, Fulani, Islamisation, jihad and Hausa*. This reflects collective memory of Igbo attacks (before and after the war) in which the instruments of ethnicity and religious dichotomy were used against the people of Igbo ethnic group. The fact that this dominates argument in the discussion suggests that a sense of insecurity was a major concern, hence the call for a referendum in the style of 'Brexit' to leave Nigeria confirming (RQ1). However, it can be said that this is a strategy of the pro-Biafra group to get sympathy and supports from their ethnic group and indeed other minorities who are suffering persecution in Nigeria. Onuoha writes that the deployment of the past memory rooted in Nigeria-Biafra war was so that it "reinforces both the quest and legitimacy of Igbo nationalism" (Onuoha, 2013b, p. 2184).

Associating words with the major Highlights of Discussion

We, again, selected five interesting documents consisting *Nigeria, Buhari, Biafraexit* and *Islamisation* to find any underlying words associated with them. We speculate that words associated with these terms will reveal how they are interpreted in the discussion. Using computational analysis, we utilised association ratio for measuring word association norms based on the idea of mutual information matrix by applying a function $findAssocs()$ which takes three arguments: x, terms, and corlimit. This is represented as $findAssocs(x, terms, corlimit)$. x is a two-dimensional matrix which is either a document-term or term-document. That is a two-dimensional matrix whose rows are the documents and columns are the terms (for document-term) or whose rows are the terms and columns are the documents (for term-document), so that each entry (i,j) represents document i and frequency of its terms j (for document-terms) or each entry (i,j) represents the frequency of term i in the document (for term-document). Terms is a character vector holding all the terms in x. Corlimit is a numerical vector for the lower correlation limits of each term in the range from zero to one.

Therefore, the function findAssocs(x, terms, and corlimit) returns a named list where each list component is named after a term in terms and contains a named numeric vector that holds matching terms from x and their rounded correlations in the range from zero to one. After building a document-term matrix, we can find which words are associated with a given word of interest by supplying a correlation value in the range from zero to one. The result is presented in Figure 5.

nigeria		buhari		biafraexit		islamisation	
freebiafra	0.62	fulani	0.66	fulani	0.58	jihad	1.00
islamisation	0.45	warn	0.57	buhari	0.55	agenda	0.75
jihad	0.45	forcing	0.56	forcing	0.45	secular	0.71
biafraexit	0.36	hausa	0.56	hausa	0.45	state	0.66
build	0.35	islamisation	0.56	islamisation	0.45	using	0.65
agenda	0.34	jihad	0.56	jihad	0.45	herdsmen	0.64
state	0.34	biafraexit	0.55	support	0.44	freebiafra	0.57
british	0.33	tribes	0.53	tribes	0.43	buhari	0.56
destroy	0.33	others	0.52	others	0.42	biafraexit	0.45
tribe	0.33	stop	0.52	warn	0.42	nigeria	0.45
murderous	0.32						
secular	0.32						

Figure 5. *Presenting word association Results.*

Our second research questions asked the extent to which the human right abuses of pro-Biafra activists under President Buhari's government facilitate feelings of religious hegemony and ethnic cleansing among pro-Biafra activists? (RQ2). Table 3 shows words correlated to the five tokens considered here and will guide us to answering this question. Looking at the words associated with the tokens, it may be interesting to consider columns for *Buhari* and *Islamisation*. The words associated with both *Buhari* and *Islamisation* are redolent of the fact that Fulani Herdsmen has symbolized a new form of jihad on other religion and that they are contrived to annihilate the Igbo ethnic group who are predominantly Christians.

Fulani herdsmen have been on a rampage, causing havoc on communities; slaughtering people in their farms and looting their property. According to (Murrey, 2017) "every week, there are more massacres, but nobody seems to mind; not even the government". Their criminal activities started few months after President Buhari was sworn-in as Nigerian President. Even the security agencies who are supposed to protect lives appears to have enabled the operation of the herdsmen in some areas. For example, Murrey (2017) reports that in Southern Kaduna, every village has a similar story; "a few days before any attack, a military helicopter is spotted dropping arms and other supplies into the areas inhabited by the Fulani tribes. Then the attack comes. For reasons of Islamic doctrine, the militia often delivers a letter of warning. Then they come, at any time of night or day, not down the dirt tracks, but silently through the foliage".

A sense of fear now pervade Christian minority in southern Kaduna and they think the Nigerian government under President Buhari is building agenda for Jihad and Islamisation of Nigeria.
In a statement by the Bishop of Kafanchan Catholic diocese, Dr Joseph Danlami Bagobiri, "the federal and Kaduna state government have failed as an unbiased umpire in protecting lives and property of her citizens above ethnic and religious persuasions". He asserts that "because the government has shown outright partisanship in favour of herdsmen… we are sometimes tempted to believe that there is a well-planned Jihad against the people of Southern Kaduna, and Christians generally in Northern Nigeria" as the incessant attacks and atrocities against the aborigines of the Middle Belt region in Northern Nigeria remains unmitigated (Tauna, 2017). This perspective is also true of the Igbos as it continued to remind them of the atrocities they have suffered in the hands of Hausa-Fulani ethnic group because of their uncompromising Christian faith (O. Oguibe, personal communication, April 21, 2017).

Many analysts suggest that the manner the government of President Buhari has handled pro-Biafra activists increased their popularity and sympathy. Not only that Biafra is generating greater appeal among the younger generation of the Igbos, it has aroused more critical questions among the intelligentsia of all ethnic groups in Nigeria. Biafra appeal has manifested in a total compliance to a sit-at-home order issued by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other pro-Biafra groups on May 30, 2017 (Adonu, 2017; Opejobi, 2017). The sit at home order was a success and "all the market, schools, Banks, Companies/industries, transport companies businesses in Biafraland were in total compliance" grounding commercial activities in the region. Igbos in Diaspora across over 80 countries also participated (Opejobi, 2017).

What factor (s) sustain group's self-determination agenda? Kelman (1997) identified some factors that could strengthen a population's claim to independence: (1) a recent history of independence which was forcibly terminated through military conquest and annexation; (2) a history and continuing experience of oppression as a minority within an existing state; (3) a history of struggle, actively supported by a large majority of a unified population; and (4) evidence that serious efforts to work out a modus Vivendi within the existing structure have failed, so that separation has become the last resort.

On the other hand the claim to an independent state would be weakened to the extent that (1) it lacks popular support and is primarily the project of ambitious, aggressive leaders, perhaps with the backing of outside powers; (2) the existing structure has been moderately successful in meeting the needs and interests of the population, including ethnic minorities; (3) the proposed state lacks the capacity to meet the needs and interests of its population; and (4) perhaps most important, there is no assurance that the proposed state is willing and able to provide adequate protection for the rights of minorities within its borders (Kelman, 1997, p. 329).

Arguably, the Nigerian government has been adamant on issues of marginalization of the Igbo, hence provided a fertile ground for them to still perceive disadvantaged. This makes it fair for anyone to think that justice will be served by an independent Biafra carved from Nigeria considering their history of repression, marginalisation and discrimination.

Reverberation of NeoBiafra Movement under President Buhari's Rule
Why did the agitation for Biafra take dangerous dimension soon after President Buhari was sworn in as Nigerian president? Let's look at the antecedents of Buhari before winning the 2015 Presidential election. Events in the past have put President Buhari in the limelight as an

uncompromising tribal leader. In 2011 post-election violence, he was alleged to have instigated the violence by his comments prior to the election. Over 500 Christians who were mostly southern Igbo inhabitants were reported to have died in the conflict (BBC, 2011). A panel of inquiry set up by the government to investigate the causes of the 2011 post-election violence specifically attributed the 2011 violence partly to the inflammatory remarks by politicians including the ones made by Buhari (Orji & Uzodi, 2012).

On a dimension of leadership strategy that varies from accommodating and unaccommodating, let us do a brief comparison between former President Goodluck Jonathan and President Buhari. President Jonathan appears closer to the accommodating end of the spectrum. This was in part a function of his own personality and his disposition to provide a fair level playing ground for every Nigerian. The pro-Biafra campaigns made no much headlines under the rule of Jonathan because Jonathan provided platforms for people to voice their resentment without fear of molestation. He addressed some of the obvious issues of marginalisation of south-east; by appointing an Igbo man as chief of army staff (for the first time in the post-war Nigeria), awarding the contract to build a second 'Naija-bridge' with possibilities of maintaining and putting into use the two sea ports in the zone as well as opening new ones that will engender conducive environment for doing business and development of the southeast. A quite number of Igbo intelligentsia were made part of the government. This contract for the second 'Naija-bridge' was terminated by President Buhari on assumption of office or at least been suspended.

He demonstrated his goodwill to address inequality by convoking a national conference drawn from different spheres of life. The conference's recommendation was applauded as it accommodated most salient issues that set to address some of the issues already in the public domain about the marginalization of Southeast. For example, the conference recommended for the additional state to be created for the south-east (though some people have reservations for this) and recommended for a rotational presidency based on six geo-political zones (which will allow the Igbo the chance to produce the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria).

Pro-Biafra activists have always hosted their Biafra remembrance day on the 30th of May without any clash with the military under Jonathan; without it making many headlines. Under Goodluck Jonathan, there were many rallies and protests by All Progressive Congress (the party of President Buhari), aimed at undermining his government and no one was arrested.

The political situation in President Buhari's government is quite different in regards to accommodating the opposition. First, his inclination to fight corruption endeared him to many, but again, his approach to it makes it seem like an attempt to silence the opposition. The fight for corruption is expected to be holistic, which means that any individual, whether of his party or opposition party, should face the law if found guilty of corruption. President Buhari started arresting his oppositions for corruption and was quick to absolve his party men of corrupt related allegations.

In relation to pro-Biafra activists, security agencies, led by the military, cracked down unarmed members of Indigenous People of Biafra, arresting and killing them at various cities of Aba and Onitsha (AmnestyInternational, 2016b). This repression caused an outrage that seems to awaken more political outcry for marginalisation, injustice and ethnoreligious hegemony among people of the south-east. This strategy made him less accommodating towards the opposition and in contrast to former President Jonathan, was closer to the unaccommodating end of the leadership spectrum.

A public commentator who gave reasons why pro-Biafran movements have reverberated under the rule of Buhari stated that Buhari was part of the young military officers who internalized anti-Igbo sentiment in the north and he was part of the plans to exterminate the Igbo race during the civil war. According to him "if the Igbo view Buhari with suspicion, it is because they are aware that he played an active part in the genocidal atrocities committed against them during the war. For instance, it is on record that he led the federal military campaigns against Ndigbo at Nsukka, Abagana, Nkpor, Abakaliki, under whose instructions, soldiers touched villages which were occupied by harmless, starved and starving Igbo children, women and the sickly" (Nwankwo, 2016). This sentiment also characterized discussions as captured in our data.

Onuoha (2013b) assert that in the post-war Nigeria, public space is one in which people harboured the memory of hurt and injury which gradually and increasingly ease out into a property of private memory, particularly where the situation that initially brought that hurt and injury continue to fester with impunity.

Significantly, the attitude of President Buhari towards the alleged massacre of unarmed IPOB members taint the minds of the Igbos about their protection under his government. Apart from the fact that his government has shown unaccommodating spirit to Ndigbo by excluding them in his major political positions, one would think that the report by Amnesty International on human right abuses of unarmed pro-Biafra activists should be a national concern and worthy of investigation. The report

revealed how "bullets were raining" on unarmed pro-Biafra protesters and how some killed protesters were burnt or even thrown in a pit to cover the evidence. "Despite this overwhelming evidence that the Nigerian security forces committed gross human rights violations including extrajudicial executions and torture, no investigations have been carried out by the Nigeria authority' till date" they stated (AmnestyInternational, 2016a).

The President bluntly refused to watch the video of the massacre when an Aljazeera reporter, Martine Dennis, tried to play it to him in one of her chats with Mr President (Perspective, 2016). This makes some analysts think that state institutionalized violence is somewhat legitimized, particularly where the victim is the so-called enemy. Ukiwo argues that the Nigeria-Biafra war has been contrived to invoke a socio-political setting in which violence is normalized, embedding a "culture of violence" in Nigerian society. And "by smashing the culture of peaceful resolution, *Biafra struggle has come to* set in motion a *free* process of militarization against *a people; a situation* in which violence is not only condoned but also celebrated and institutionalized as an instrument of statecraft" (Ukiwo, 2009, p. 10 mine in the italics).

All these add up to the frustrations of people in the eastern Nigeria that they think the Hausa-Fulani Muslim north who had had the greater privilege of ruling Nigeria are making ground plans to exterminate Christianity and Islamise Nigeria. However right or wrong this perception may be, the President appears to have given room for this perception to become commonplace by not only being expressively dismissive in matters regarding 'Ndigbo' but also in his proclamation that region which gave him 97% of the votes will receive adequate preferential recognition in the allocation of national resources compared to the region which gave him 3% (9JaBrozz, 2015).

Consequently, the Igbo ethnic group who voted massively for President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria have interpreted this statement to mean a new plan to further marginalize them (which played out in Mr President's political appointments). As their peaceful protests were turned bloody by agents of the Nigerian security, the vision of an independent Biafra becomes an acceptable mission, particularly among the younger generation of Igbos.

A quick comparison of the token '*Buhari*' and '*Biafraexit*' with regards to words they are associated with may hold prey to this claim and may have influenced the conversation. Both tokens have a clear similarity of word associations, with words such as '*warn*' '*Buhari*' '*stop*' '*forcing*' '*Hausa*' assuming correlation values between 0.66-0.45. It is, therefore, safe to infer that the inability of the government to quell repeated violence that has targeted the Igbos outside of Igbo land and/or publicly punish perpetrators and sponsors have continued to sustain the feeling and perception that the Igbos will not be protected by the government.

Emotional Sentiments

Twitter users tend to show *emotional accommodation* (i.e. share common feelings with their conversational partners), suggesting that the subject of an utterance or the topic of discussion is significantly related to change in emotion in human conversation (Kim, Bak, & Oh, 2012). Kim et al demonstrate that topics can effectively change the emotions of Tweeters from positive to negative, especially where the object of utterances include "worry, teasing and complaint" (Ibid, p.497).

Our data suggests those tweeting about 'Biafraexit' share common feelings of devastation. We argue that the emotions and sentiments expressed offline about social political and economic challenges as well as deepened feelings of marginalisation of Igbos have grown to influence sentiments and emotional expressions of participants in the conversation.

To understand the feelings associated with the 'Biafraexit', 'freebiafra' hashtags and 'Biafra' search term, we used an R package called 'sentiment' which contains tools for sentiment analyses including Bayesian classifiers for positivity/negativity and emotional classification. The polarity (positivity/negativity) classifier was trained using the subjectivity lexicon by Jan Wiebe (Wilson, Wiebe, & Hoffmann, 2005).
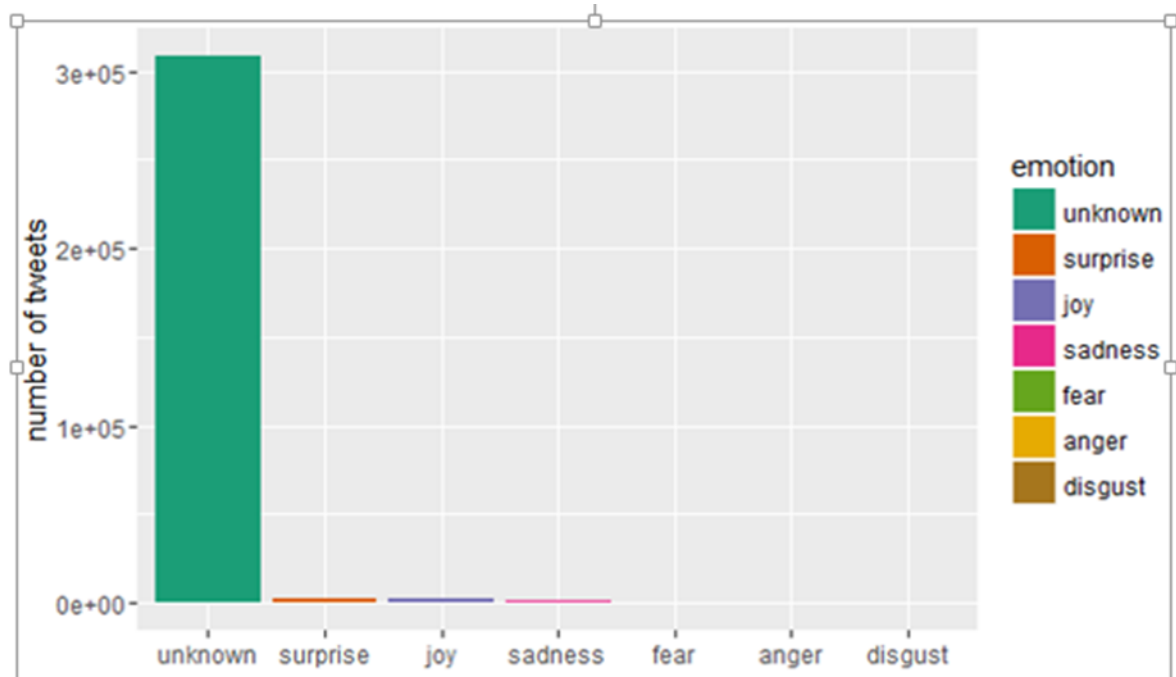
Figure 6. *Emotion Category*

We classified emotions using a naïve Bayes classifier trained on Carlo Strapparava and Alessandro Valitutti's lexicon. The lexicon is a dataset containing approximately 1500 words classified into six emotion categories: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise (Strapparava & Valitutti, 2004). After plotting the distribution of the emotions (Figure 6), we also separated the words and visualised with comparison cloud (Figure 7).
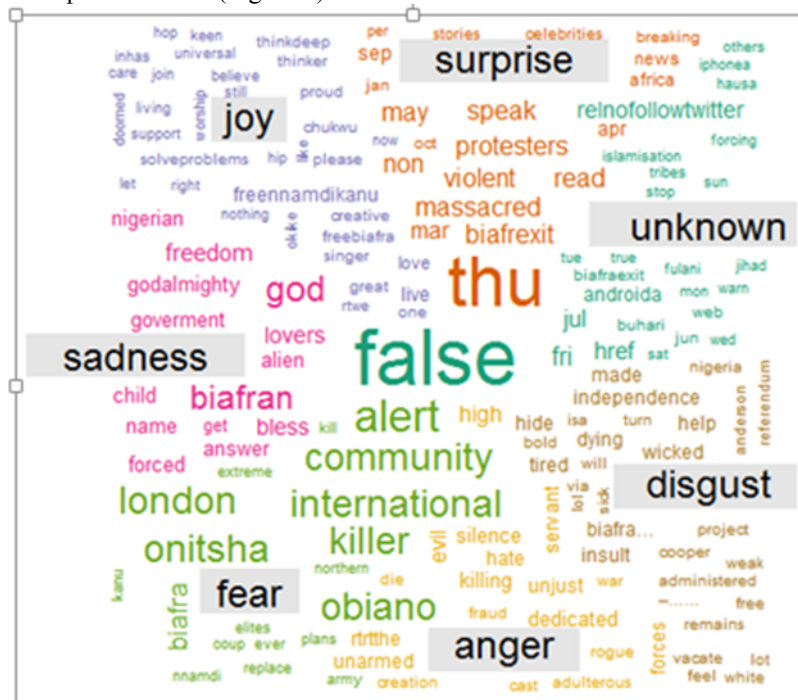

Figure 7. *Emotion comparison cloud*

The distribution of emotion categories as shown in Figure 4, suggests that most common emotions were *Unknown*, with few others as *Surprise*, *Joy* and *Sadness*. This is expected considering the fact that social conversations often involves usage of non-standard natural language expression.

Notably, as a weakness, the limited 140 characters within which Twitter allows suggest that some words will make no meaning to the traditional representation of words (bag of words) used in this paper. The automated classification of emotions from emotional lexicon can sometimes evoke different

emotions when used in different contexts. This is because some Tweets can be assigned the wrong polarity and thus wrong emotion because of the context and presence of certain positive or negative words. For example, in Table 1, the lines highlighted is a good example of misclassification of polarity. The presence of some negative words in the first highlighted line caused the algorithm to assign negative score wherein the Tweet is supposedly positive. The same is applicable to the second highlighted line which is assigned positive score when it should be negative. The algorithm is not perfect as it is a human designed application and may not contain all emerging words.

However, Figure 5 shows interesting emotive trends in terms of their descriptive and predictive value with regards to existing social-political issues trailing unending quest for the restoration of Biafra. We can see that the most significant terms under emotion *JOY* among others includes: '*solve problems*', '*free Nnamdi Kanu*', and '*free Biafra*'. Others include '*support*', '*care*' '*hope*' '*love*' and '*right*'. This paint a picture of a general expectation for justice, equity and release of Nnamdi Kanu and thus, '*solving' the problem regarding hate, killing, unjust treatment and ethnic cleansing targeting the Igbo* (as clearly denoted under emotions: '*ANGER, SADNESS, SURPRISE* and *DISGUS*T), or evoking a referendum through the support and supervision of international community was desired.

The continuous detention of Nnamdi Kanu, even with several court orders for his release, was still creating the impression of the authoritarian culture of Nigeria statehood and it was reviving the consciousness and sympathy for Biafra agitation. The implication is that as Nnamdi Kanu continues to be held by Nigerian authority more people are likely to appreciate the frustrations of pro-Biafrans and may bring more tension to Nigerian government if leaders continue to treat it with levity. Relatedly, where protests continue to evolve, the high-handed approach would ravenously earn the agitators wide local sympathy, radicalize their followers and trigger more desperate actions.

Discussion

The Igbo as an Endangered Ethnic Group

First, our data has suggested that the Igbo who is the major inhabitant of the defunct area called Biafra actually harbour a sense of insecurity and fear of extermination, on one hand, and a sense of opportunity in the new Republic of Biafra on the other. They appear to be conscious of the fact that they are an endangered set of people in Nigeria and the desire to have a separate sovereign state of Biafra overwhelm them. Unfortunately, to them, the name 'Biafra' seems repulsive to other ethnic groups that any debate suggestive of correcting the professed marginalization is given a political or ethnic twist and thrown to the wind.

The right to life is the most basic of fundamental human right and it constitutes a major argument for self-determination. Biafrans were denied this fundamental and inalienable right of existence more than any other group in Nigeria. Prior to the crises of 1966, there were three separate instances – 1945 in Jos, 1953 in Kano and 1964 in Kaduna in which Igbos were slaughtered in cold blood for no just reason by supposedly fellow countrymen and women (Nnamani, 2016). These mass killing were only an iceberg of the impending and greater tragedy which came in 1966. No one was tried and the mass killing continued. As the death toll rose astronomically amidst fear of federal government's unwillingness to stop the massacre, a real and genuine fear of annihilation gripped the Easterners that the declaration of Biafra was inevitable.

Fast-forward to 2017, the Igbo is still hounded with violence, repression and discrimination. They appear to be rejected set of people, as such thinks with Biafra, they will not only assume self-autonomy but get protection from total extinction. Direct or indirect state violence against a certain ethnic group who already harbour ethnic hegemonic and marginalisation grievances and that has sought to secede in the past, will only exacerbate an unconscious feeling of alienation.

Scholars have argued that self-determination is a necessary principle without which human rights and fundamental freedom suffers. Kelman notes that:

> National identity, national self-determination, and the establishment of a state as the political expression of a group's national identity are in themselves positive concepts: They represent major sources of human dignity and self-esteem for populations that have been subjected to oppression, colonization, humiliation, and discrimination; and they are vehicles for ending these conditions and producing favourable changes, materially as well as psychologically, in the terms of their existence (Kelman, 1997, p. 330)

There is some basic moral justification for a distinct community to withdraw from an existing state. John Stuart Mill acknowledged that "freedom and liberty may not be possible when the state is an artificial agglomeration of two or more distinct communities with one dominating the mechanisms of

government", and thus, conceded that secession may be a necessary alternative to promote liberty (Bartkus, 1999, p. 16).

In his investigation of cases of secession, Alan Buchanan specifies further the circumstances under which "right to secede" may exist. Such circumstances includes (1) if the state cannot or will not protect the seceding group from physical threat; (2) if the state systematically exploits one group for the benefit of others; (3) if the state cannot or will not protect a group's culture from disappearing (Kymlicka & Buchanan, 1992, p. 528). It is fair to assert that the Indigenous People of Biafran (specifically the Igbo ethnic group) have suffered physical threat and annihilation, are stereotyped and exploited for the benefit other ethnic group and therefore subjected to nomadic commercial lifestyle as a strategy of survival within the Nigerian society.

Nnamani (2016) notes that the marriage between Ireland and Britain in 1880s, which abolished Irish parliament, did not translate to homogenous social life. And like Nigeria, it was only constitutional and the Irish were disenfranchised. There was a bloody riot in 1886 and 1893, which resulted in the granting of Dominion status in 1921 and independence in 1937, respectively, to the Irish. Today both countries live side by side in peace.

Also, the case of Malaysia and Singapore is readily at hand in which Singapore seceded from Malaysia without a bloodshed. In Africa, there have been cases of broken unions, where co-existence became impossible or simply when different groups wanted to be on their own. Rwanda and Burundi were part of Belgium but were allowed self-governance to avoid impending bloodshed arising from envisaged inter-ethnic squabble. The then Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland gave birth to the present day Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Nnamani, 2016).

In the light of the foregoing, the argument that Nigeria must remain one no matter what happened is quite untenable. Where the fundamental human rights of the indigenous people of Biafra are no longer protected, the government loses any claim to allegiance and authority over those whose human right it has violated.

In this regard, justice is a necessary ingredient of peace; subjugation and marginalisation of Ndigbo are particularly unjust and thus, would inevitably lead to the threat of peace (such as the ones happening in Nigeria in recent times). It does appear that Igbo marginalization is a desperate attempt to systematically render them less valuable to Nigerian economy (having been identified as a most industrious set of people). It is pertinent to note that the desire to seek secession invokes a territorial claim. This is so that past injustice is corrected.

In respect of the above arguments, the reverberation of Biafra separatist campaigns represent a general mood of lack of trust in the Nigerian state, particularly in (1) providing security of lives and property, (2) providing inclusive, and equitable governance; (3) protection of fundamental human rights and (4) respect for religious values and expression. All of these significantly invoke collective feelings of disaffection in the southeastern Nigeria; their mood, 'one of despair and dejection bordering on collective depression, engendering in the youths a certain collective desperation' (Offodile, 2016, p. 159). This has been the mood in Nigeria's South East since the period of the Nigerian –Biafran war and it is worsening by the day.

Repression as Statecraft

Research has suggested that government repression significantly increased the likelihood to seek self-determination. According to (Walter, 2006), certain types of grievances play a critical role in ethnic group behaviour: "an ethnic group whose political status is low or is concerned about their religious freedom and had lost power to the central government through military repression is prone to continue to seek autonomy", *especially where substantive issues that previously caused disagreement are still omnipresent* (p. 122, mine in the italics).

On several occasions in Nigeria, state institutionalized violence, through its security agencies, on separatist or radical movements have rather escalated the severity of the situation rather than calming it.

In 2009, the murder of Mohammed Yusuf, the erstwhile leader of Boko Haram, while in police custody led to the transformation of the sect into the organisation it is today. Similarly, the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), by the Abacha military government led to Nigeria's international pariah status and commonwealth's suspension of Abuja for three years (Campbell, 2015). The movement was joined by other minorities within the Niger-Delta and reverberated much more strongly following the judicial killing of Saro-Wiwa (Osaghae, 2003).

The deployment of narratives that describes violence against the Igbos in Nigeria by leaders of pro-Biafra supporters was not only to expose the scale of violence to which the Igbo had historically been subjected but also to draw attention to the "traditional" unwillingness of the Nigerian state to

protect Igbo life and property (Ukiwo, 2009). This is important to bring moral justification for secession in the pro-Biafra movement. As written by Strassberg (1998), the experience of the Holocaust and the transfer of its memories across generations largely account for why Jews everywhere emphasized their Jewish identity above national identities (cited in Ukiwo, 2009).

In the same vain, Osaghae (2003) also noted that past wrongs, injustices and conflicts, in particular, provide the memory backdrop against which members of ethnic groups related with the state or members of another group. It is pertinent to note that as people feel insecure in their membership with a community, they are forced to review their circumstances and political alternative. Application of violence on pro-Biafra movements may likely strengthen them, make it fairly easy for them to mobilise popular support within their ethnic group and indeed international community, rather than overcome them.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that the major factor driving pro-Biafra activism in Nigeria is a huge sense of insecurity of the Igbo ethnic group. Although our data may not be sufficient to make some sort of generalization, it is pertinent to note that this debate on Twitter reveals some salient opinion on the prevailing socio-political and economic issues necessitating the call for a referendum in Nigeria in the style of 'Brexit'. We suggest that the quest for 'Biafraexit' resonates with the reality of a common feeling of devastation among the Igbos. And in failing to guarantee the security of Biafrans, especially in their right to peaceful assembly and association, the army has further heightened the tension and perceptions that the Igbos cannot be protected by Nigerian government.

As indicated by Ukiwo (2009), state violence – "the act by the state or its agents that causes physical or mental injury against the person or property of its law-abiding citizen or group of citizens or where state is not directly involved, refuses to intervene or prosecute the perpetrators of violence" – explains why the Igbo ethnic group, which in the colonial era and during the early years of independence was apparently most committed to a common Nigerian identity, currently has the highest percentage of citizens who favour ethnic over national identity. The same destructive pressures of state violence that led to the outbreak of civil war in the 1960s have triggered a reimagining of Biafra among the Igbo in a way that is heating up Nigeria's polity today.

We recommend that Nigerian government should make opportunity for a referendum possible for the different groups to determine their collective existence. If the right of Isreal to a separate state on the ground of security was recognised by the international judicial persons – the UN, the OAU and the Commonwealth, why should the same criterion not be applied to the Biafrans?(Nnamani, 2016). If Bangladesh and Eritrea could separate from the oppressive regimes of Pakistan and Ethiopia, respectively, why is it difficult to address Biafra questions before it leads to another massive bloodshed.

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