

**MILITARY APPROACH AND BIAFRA INCESSANT SECESSIONIST
AGITATION IN NIGERIA’S FOURTH REPUBLIC: EXPLORING THE
POTENCY OF INDIGENOUS CONFLICT MECHANISM.**

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Abstract

The paper examines the potency of indigenous conflict management in curbing incessant Biafra secessionist agitations in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. It explores the mechanisms or approaches Nigerian government has used overtime in combatting Biafra agitation since its inception in 1967. The objective is to probe the effectiveness of indigenous approach of conflict management in curbing Biafra secessionist agitation and to project reasons military responses to Biafra secessionist agitation would not curb the separatist movement. The paper adopted phenomenology design and data collected were thematically presented and content analyzed. Just War Theory was used to underpin the paper. The paper found that the incessant Biafra secessionist agitations in Nigeria’s fourth Republic are influenced by unresolved National question, such as marginalization of the Igbos in Nigerian government and chiefly the use of military force in combating Biafra secessionist agitations by Nigerian government. The paper therefore, suggested indigenous conflict resolution as means of curbing the question of Biafra secessionist agitation in Nigeria. The paper concluded that military approach to Biafra secessionist agitation created more resentment and triggers the separatist movement. Negotiation with the secessionist leaders through their traditional rulers was discovered to be one of the possible means for curbing Biafra secessionist agitation.

Keywords: Military Approach, Biafra Secessionist Agitation, Nigeria’s fourth Republic, and Endogenous Conflict Mechanism.

INTRODUCTION

The Biafra question is one discuss in Nigeria that never gets old or dies a natural death. Most times, it regenerates with multifaceted pain of maltreatment, betrayal and inhumanity, to both the fraction of the victor and vanquish in the war. People have suggested that because of the negative effect of the Biafra war, Nigerian government has deliberately removed the study of Nigerian Civil War in secondary school curriculum in the country in order not to procreate the resentment that is attached with the War Civil. However, it is good to abandon the past to pursue the future but a past like the Nigerian civil war requires an open burial with communal effort to avoid blame and suspicion as we have today. Moreover, it is evident that since the Biafra nationalism ended in 1970, the call for Biafra secession from Nigerian government has never stopped, but rather becomes intensified in the Fourth Republic. The Fourth Republic Biafra's secessionist agitation, according to extant literature, is influenced by the resentment of the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War and replication of maltreatments on the Igbos as observed by Ezeani (2016).

Ralph (2008) in his opinion, observed that in the bid to stop Biafra's political disturbance [secessionist agitation], Nigerian government has adopted the use of force or counter force on many occasions, as seen in the case of Uwazurike, the leader of MASSOB in 2005, and the arrest of NnamdiKanu, the leader of IPOB in 2015 by the security operatives (Vanguard, 2015). Obviously, the use of force as an approach by Nigerian government has aided the escalation of the agitation for Igbo sovereignty in Nigeria. It is important to note that one of the challenging factors limiting curbing of secessionist agitation in Nigeria is lack of reconciliation on what constitutes the root causes of secessionist agitation in Nigeria and the use of wrong mechanism in approaching the issue. As Aristotle said, "We make war to have peace" (Brosdie 1999) which implied that the essence of every war must be to make peace at the end of it. Literature on government and politics agreed that conflict is a vital part of politics, which means that in the absence of conflict, there is no politics. Aristotle also holds that through conflict, social institutions can be strengthened, and problems of the society discovered and resolved which will encourage societal unity. As stipulated above, there will always be conflict in any given polity; however, secessionist agitation as a form of political unrest is gaining more supporters daily because of the increase in malfunctioning of the government in the Nigeria's fourth Republic. This has led to the increase in the number of National question in the country.

When people lose faith in government they take solace in the tribe and tribe is the arch-enemy of the State. Where there is tribalism, the government loses legitimacy and when the government lacks support of the citizenry the unity, integration of such country is in trouble, and this is the position of Nigeria in the present leadership where accountability is in question. This means that there is a need to revisit the study on the root causes of Biafra secessionist agitation and to provide a possible way of curbing the agitation to save Nigeria's National integration. The possibility of curbing Biafra secessionist agitation in Nigeria is high if only the nexus between wrong approach by Nigerian government in combating the Biafra agitation and incessant Biafra secessionist agitations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic can be established.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to investigate the potency of indigenous mechanism in curbing Biafra incessant secessionist agitations in Nigeria, with the aim of stating reasons military combat will not stop the agitation especially in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

and to evaluate causes of Biafra agitation in Nigeria's fourth Republic. The paper is structured in the following ways to achieve the above stated objectives: introduction, methodology, conceptual definitions of germane concepts in the research, and they are: military approach, Biafra secessionist agitation, Nigeria's fourth Republic, and indigenous conflict mechanism. The next division deals with theoretical underpinning and lastly discussions of findings, while the paper concludes with relevant recommendations that will aid the government in curbing Biafra agitations in Nigeria fourth Republic.

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology design was considered appropriate for this research because it allows for the examination of an event or situation in-depth, using various kinds of evidences obtained from interview and focus group discussion with those involved and analysis of documents (Prushant, 2013). Abia, Anambra and Imo States constitute the population of this study. The research adopted a purposive sample design. Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State, Nneiwe North of Anambra State, and Okigwe in Imo State were purposively selected among other Local government Areas in the selected States, because these local governments have produced leaders of Biafra secessionist movement and have also participated more in Biafra secessionist agitations. Data were collected using documentary reviews, interviews, and focus group discussions to elicit information from the respondents. The researcher conducted three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on each of the research respondents: "teachers, street urchins, IPOB and MASSOB members", in the selected local governments areas of the study making a total number of twelve FGDs. Guided and in-depth interviews were conducted on seven traditional rulers and one family member of each of the agitators "Kanu, Ojukwu, and Uwazuruike". The instruments for data collection were structured interviews and FGDs guides, and data collected were content analyzed in thematic form.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

This section of the paper defines and justifies the value of germane concepts examined in the paper and they are defined as follows:

MILITARY APPROACH

Human Rights' watch (1999) and Aghalino (2009) in their individual documentations observed that military approach of combating terrorism is the use of military strength to fight terrorist groups. Therefore, in the case of Biafra secessionist agitations it will mean the use of military strength by Nigeria government in combating Biafra agitations. Military approach could also be identified as counter-terrorism, this approach was used on Niger Delta Militants during President Obasanjo's administration and it does not achieve the desired result but rather increase the militancy struggle in the region.

BIAFRA SECESSIONIST AGITATION

Biafra was a sovereign State that existed around 1967-1970 according to extant literature in the Eastern part of current Nigeria while agitation is a process of protesting to revolt with the aim of changing a given narrative. Secession, on the other hand, according to Akinyetun, means the "method by which a whole tries to detach itself from the entity to which it is and to form a novel entity on part of the land of the state" (Akinyetun, 2018, p.12). Moreover, Mandal (2009) discussed the disparity that exists between secession and

other compound concepts. It is vital therefore, to differentiate between dissolution, secessionist agitation and self-determination. Scholars, most times, as noted by Akinyetun (2018), have interchangeably used secession, self-determination, and dissolution. Though the concepts may share thin line, but they are quite different in many ways as evident in the definition of secession above.

NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

The concept of Fourth Republic, as a political dispensation in Nigerian government and politics ended the last military dictatorship in Nigeria in May 29, 1999, which was because of the death of the then Military dictator, General Sani Abacha in 1998. General Abdusalam Abubakar who was the second in command at this time made it possible for power to shift from Military to civilian government. According to Enyi (2014), the Nigeria's Fourth Republic was like a long awaited event, because many had prayed and wished it came owing to the maltreatment by the then military tyrant on the citizens.

INDIGENOUS CONFLICT MECHANISM

According to Ayo (2002) indigenous conflict resolutions [mechanisms] are those "pre-existing political administrative and judicial machineries in operation in the centralized and decentralized African societies before the advent of colonialism". On the other hand, Murithi (2006) described traditional approach of conflict management to mean a doctrine that focuses on 'empathy', collaboration of conflict parties in resolving disputes. The researcher also noted that the cooperation among belligerent parties in indigenous conflict mechanism underline the importance of humanity. The observation of Murithi (2006) does not only depict the meaning of traditional approach of conflict management, but crystallizes the importance and merit of endogenous approach to conflict management against the Westphalia approach [Military].

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING:

JUST WAR THEORY

Just War theory was developed by Augustine (354-430) as a foundation for just war in Western literature (Paul 2006; Mbagwu, 2017). Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) codified Augustine's reflections into the distinct criteria that remain the basis of just war theory as it is used today in conflict resolution studies and practice. This approach is adopted in this paper to examine if there were war crimes committed against the Igbos during the Nigeria Civil War and whether Nigerian Government is right in using military might against Biafra agitators currently.

The main aim of this principle is to provide justification on; going to War and the conduct of War. Just War Theory has two categories which are: *Jus ad-bellum* and *Jus in bello* (Paul, et al 2009, p.180; Mbagwu, 2017, p.98). *Jus ad-bellum* means the conditions required for just war or the right of States to engage in war. While *jus in bello*, on the other hand, means conduct of war, or the right conduct of war.

Just Authority: This is the first provision in just war theory, it is also known as competent Authority. It means that the only legal authority to declare the use of military force in war or such situation is a legitimate government i.e. government that is elected and accepted by the people.

The implication of this is that we cannot have a genuine process of judging a just war within a system that is against the process of genuine justice (Paul et al, 2009, p. 180). A political

authority within a political system that promotes justice (a democratic government not dictatorship) must initiate a Just War. One of the characteristics of military regime in Nigeria is suspension of the constitution by the supreme military council through a decree by the military dictator (Abia, 2006). With the above stipulation of the Just war theory, it is clear that Gowon lacked the qualification as a military dictator to declare just war in Nigeria against Biafra. What this means owing to the above model is that the 1967-1970, Nigerian Civil War was unjust. Additionally, the fourth Republic militaristic approach on Biafra agitation could be in consonance with this principle; however, Nigerian Civil ended in 1970 therefore there is no need of using military arsenal on noncombatants. Nevertheless, other sub principles of just war like just cause, just intention, last resort, will justify if the use of military approach is the best response to Biafra agitation.

Just Cause: This is the second and the central condition for many discussions over the justification of the use of military responses. According to Paul *et al.* (2006) unprovoked aggression, such as an invasion, fits clearly within the criteria of a just cause, because only a few would deny a nation the right to defend itself against unprovoked attacks. The defense of an ally against an aggressor is also generally considered a clear just cause in international politics.

Probing Nigerian Civil War and the military response to Biafra's agitation in Nigeria's fourth Republic in this light, it is important to what informs the use of military force in resolving internal dispute by the Nigerian government. This could be one of the reasons many writers and historians compare Nigerian Civil War with Nazi Germany, which was a planned, and plotted coup to destroy the Jews out of the face of the earth (Paul, et al., 2006).

Just Intention: This is the third principle of just war. Just intention or right intention sets limits to the extent of war. Even when there is a just authority and just cause, it is possible for a warring State to go beyond the bounds of its justification. If the fight against the Igbos was to protect the sovereignty of Nigeria, it would then be for a good intention executed in wrong approach. One may go on to probe the reasons for the Nigerian civil war or the use of military might against the Biafra agitators, by considering the positions of the pro-Biafrans on the causes of 1967-1970 Civil War, which excessive and extrajudicial killing of the Igbos was one of the major reasons (Achiebe, 1983).

Last Resort: This is the fourth and the last sub-doctrine of just war theory (*jus ad-bellum*), this sub-principle of just war, states that before any country or Nation can go to war, every other methods of settling disputes might have been exhausted. Then one may like to ask "if Nigerian Government exhausted all the diplomatic means of settling Nigerian-Eastern region dispute before declaring war on the Igbos". The answers to this question could justify the intention of Nigerian government over the Civil War against the Igbo Community (Ezeani, 2016; Paul et al, 2006). Having examined the sub-principles of just war, side by side with the government's use of military might against Biafra agitation, it is clear that the Nigerian government did not meet any of the grounds that could have justified Nigerian Civil War as a just war or the use of military force against Biafra agitators.

The conduct of war is guarded by the principle of *jus in-bello*, which means the right conduct in war. This second principle of laws of War stated the standards, conduct for Nations, armies and individual soldiers at War. Some people believe the notion that in war rules does not apply. Maybe this could not be far from the philosophy of Nigerian Soldiers as evident in the high number of causality recorded in relation to Biafra agitation. In War, soldiers maintain some standards of lawfulness and even prisons and courts are established

to prosecute combatants that violate the Laws of war, but in the case of the Nigerian Civil War, it was the opposite. Nigerian government adopted the use of food blockade “starvation to kill innocent Children, aged Igbos, women and men” (Chinua, 2012). What a misuse of the laws of War. The principle or the doctrine of Jus in-Bello, clarify conducts of war that are permissible during armed conflict, and they are: Proportionality, Discrimination and Responsibility.

It is germane therefore, to state that the Nigerian government violated all the conduct of war during the Nigeria Civil War. And lack the justification for the use of military force on Biafra agitators in fourth Republic, because the Biafra war ended since 1970. In addition, the principles or right conducts of war: Proportionality, Discrimination and Responsibility fault the extrajudicial killing of Biafra agitators in fourth Republic.

Sjoberg in Mbagwu (2017, p.100) observed the limitation of just war theory in analyzing war. In her opinion, “just war is discourse rather than a moral frame work.” The researchers observed that just war theory lacks the grounds to be moral standards for war. Reason being that the just war theory does not prohibit war or support war. However, it is important to submit that Just War Theory as adopted in this paper deals more on the causes and triggers of secessionist agitation in Nigeria’ fourth Republic, which is one of the major objectives of this study, hence, we submit that Just War Theory is applicable in this study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Corruption and bad governance was described by discussants and interviewees as the causes of secessionist agitations. The study found that unequal political appointment, marginalization, inequality on allocation of natural resources, hatred of the Igbos by the Hausa and Yoruba tribes, the cheating of the Igbos before and after the civil war, embezzlement of public funds by political leaders from Hausa and Yoruba regions, unemployment, the use and arming of the youths by the politicians, history of the Nigeria civil war, uneven development are discovered to be major causes of secessionist agitations while the positions of the research interviewees and discussants refuted poor education on the side of the Igbos as one of the causes of the Biafra secessionist agitation. The assertions of the field data are supported by the stipulation of Ade (1992) that unresolved National question is “...the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same privileges, access to power and equitable share of the National resources”. Furthermore, researchers like (Hechter, 1975, 1992; Bates, 1974; Horowitz, 1981, 2000; Effiong, 1970; Ransome-Kuti, 1999; Goke, 2016; Ezeani, 2016) supported the above positions.

Furthermore, the positions of the research discussants on the aftermath of counter-coup and the killing of the Igbo as a trigger of Biafra secessionist agitation was affirmed in the work of Soyinka (2006).

In summary, 100% of the personal interview respondents and 100% of FGD discussants unanimously agreed that marginalization, inequality on allocation of natural resources, hatred of the Igbos by the Hausas and Yorubas, the cheating of the Igbos before and after the civil war, embezzlement of public funds by political leaders from Hausa and Yoruba regions, unemployment, the use and arming of the youths by politicians, history of the Nigerian civil war, and uneven development are the major causes of Biafra secessionist agitation. While 90% and above of both the FGD and PI participants disagreed that poor education is one of the root causes of Biafra secessionist agitation.

The study also found that the traditional rulers believed that they can resolve the Biafra secessionist agitation, while some of the other participants especially the MASSOB and IPOB members disagreed with the assertions of the traditional rulers' abilities in resolving the agitation. The traditional rulers asserted that by training and calling that they are peace makers and custodians of tradition, which puts them in the best position to resolve the Biafra agitation. While on the other hand, street urchins, MASSOB and IPOB respondents have little faith in the traditional rulers with the opinion that some of the traditional rulers have joined hands with the Nigerian government to persecute them “the youths”.

Juxtaposing the positions of the interviewees, the research discusses with extant literature as observed by Zartman (2000, p.222), “Restorative justice has to be understood as a compensation for loss, not as retribution for offense”, it is evident that the traditional approach to conflict management can resolve the issue of Biafra secessionist agitation against the position of some MASSOB and IPOB members. Because almost all the conflict in the world are settled on the round table “dialogue”.

Additionally, the study revealed multiple notions of the research participants on the ability of negotiation in resolving the Biafra agitations. The traditional rulers and few other research participants like the teachers believed that negotiations can encourage peace or create an opportunity for the resolution of Biafra agitation while some of the participants, the street urchins MASSOB and IPOB members interviewed asserted that negotiation cannot be the solution to Biafra secessionist agitation, with the reason that Nigeria government will not keep to decisions of the dialogue. However, the position of Fred-Mensah (2005), in Kwaaku&Morena (n.d), also observed that indigenous conflict resolution uses negotiation as a mechanism, which brings the disputing parties together to seek for solution to their problems themselves. Therefore, the position of Fred-Mensah (2005) supported that negotiation will aid the resolution of Biafra secessionist agitations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As observed in this paper, the greatest challenge of humanity is not the occurrence of war or other violent conflicts but the ability to discover and adopt the best approach that will encourage a winning equilibrium among the warring parties. Therefore, the study depicts that wrong approach to Biafra secessionist agitation, particularly the use of military might against the agitators is a major factor among others discovered to trigger the incessant Biafra agitations in Nigeria's fourth Republic. Moreover, the paper found that traditional approach to conflict management is capable of resolving the dispute among the Biafra agitators and Nigerian government. Though Boege (2006, p.15) has noted five disadvantages of indigenous approach of conflict management as follows: “(i) does not stop violence in the long term; (ii) traditional conflict styles violate human rights; (iii) the doctrine is not universally applicable; (iv) they are aimed at preserving the good old orders; (vii) they are abuse prone”. Lastly, having observed the noted demerits of traditional approach to conflict resolution by scholars, the paper will maintain the opinion and positions of scholars like (Zartman, 2000; Faure, 2000; Tombot, 2003; Boege, 2006; Pkalya et al 2004; Alao, 2005 &Mbagwu, 2016), that traditional approach is still the best approach in resolving Biafra agitation in Nigeria, having seen the successes of the approach in other violent conflicts in Nigeria such as the: Otuocha land and Aguleri-Umuleri dispute in Anambra State, Umunebo-Umuokuzu, Okrika and Niger-delta militancy as observed by Alagoa, (1998).

Additionally, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- Nigerian government should negotiate for peaceful settlement with Biafra agitators through their traditional rulers.
- Nigeria government should enforce section 18(3c) of 1999 CFRN as amended to counter secessionist agitation through proper education and not through military might. In addition, the doctrine of traditional conflict resolution can be incorporated into Nigeria's school curricular to encourage wide acceptance and practice.
- Resolving the dichotomy on the root causes of Biafra agitations will go a long way in creating a win/win situation.
- Adequate promotion of National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) and inter- ethnic marriage, will help procreate peace because the major effects of the Biafra Civil War in Nigeria society are bias, resentment and disintegration.
- Lastly, restructuring of Nigeria polity to accommodate the interest of the vanquished of Nigerian Civil War and other minority groups in the country will discourage secessionist agitation.

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