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Between Self-determination and Secession: An Assessment of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) Agitations for the Independence of Southeast Nigeria

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Between Self-determination and Secession

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Abstract

This thesis assesses the conflict between the Nigerian state and an ethnic-based organization called the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The Nigerian-IPOB conflict stems from the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 - 1970, which was caused by a secessionist attempt by the eastern region of Nigeria, historically referred to as The Biafra War. Amid claims of marginalization and the adoption of indigenousness as an identity marker for the Igbo people, IPOB has emerged as an ethno-political movement advocating for the self-determination of the Igbo-dominated Southeastern provinces. IPOB's secession demands are pursued within the framework of self-determination for indigenous people and mainly manifest as armed civil resistance.

This thesis focuses on how IPOB's adoption of indigenous identity shapes their demands for self-determination and how the Nigerian government's response to such demands prolongs the conflict. The study is based on secondary materials and primary sources gathered through qualitative interviews with IPOB members, the broader Igbo ethnic members in Umuahia, Abia State, located in Southeastern Nigeria.

Using the Primary Right and Remedial Right Theories of Secession as analytical frameworks, the study found that the persistence of the Nigeria-IPOB conflict is largely due to the Nigerian government's use of force and repressive strategies to suppress IPOB operatives. This study also found that the perception of the exclusion of the Igbo ethnic group from Nigeria's national political leadership influences feelings of victimization and alienation. This highlights the problem of exclusion in conflicts revolving around demands for self-determination by ethnic groups invoking indigenousness. The study also found that national unity in Nigeria is threatened by lingering feelings of marginalization of the Igbo people after the civil war.

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Abbreviations

AG	Action Group
AM	Ambazonia Movement
AU	African Union
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria
ESN	The Eastern Security Network
FDG	Focused Group Discussion
FMGN	Federal Military Government of Nigeria
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INC	Ijaw National Council
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta
MASSOB	Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra
MASOP	Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
MNLA	The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MOSIEN	Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality
MFDC	*Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance*
NIP	National Integration Program
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OPC	Odua People's Congress
RRR	Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

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1 Introduction

Over the past 50 years, national minorities and other groups have become increasingly vocal in their demands for greater territorial autonomy, including the ability to secede and create their own sovereign states (Webb, 2006). Meanwhile, separatist activities and advocacy for self-determination are not unfamiliar phenomena in the African continent. It is noted that Africa tends to foster separatist thoughts due to the diversity of its ethnic, linguistic, and religious groupings and the insufficient social cohesion of its states (Denisova et al., 2021). Furthermore, continuous agitations for secession by ethnic minorities are often considered one of the injustices and legacies of colonialism in Africa. According to Trzciński (2004), minorities from diverse backgrounds might choose to withdraw from the unions they were forced into because of European border creations during the early years of colonialism in Africa.

Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa, has been affected by separatist agitations since gaining independence from Britain in 1960. Tamuno (2002) argued that several factors, including unstable politics, military coups d'état, refugee problems, and secessionist movements, threatened Nigeria's stability. Foreign observers even predicted that this newly independent, democratic, multinational state in West Africa would fail (Tamuno 2002). Among the myriad challenges the Nigerian state faces, only the separatist agitations by various groups have posed a significant threat to the country's survival and raised concerns about human safety.

This study aims to explore the ongoing violence between the Nigerian state and a movement known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Literature describes IPOB as a secessionist group that has been fighting for the independence of the Igbo ethnic group in the Southeastern territory of Nigeria since 2012. The new dimension of IPOB, driven by their demands for an independent Igbo country- Biafra[1], has led the group to engage in persistent violent conflicts with the Nigerian state. While numerous studies have examined the escalating violence characterizing the conflict, limited research attention has been devoted to understanding why the conflict remains unresolved.

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[1] Biafra is the name of an imagined country the Igbo ethnic group created prior the Nigerian civil war. Although, it is said to have been recognized by a few countries as a sovereign state within the period of the Nigeria civil war. For the purpose of this study, Biafra will be noted as Igbo ethnic group's country that never existed.

This study begins by taking the demands of IPOB as the starting point of inquiry, with a specific focus on the issue of political marginalization. In the context of the separatist agitations of the IPOB group, political marginalization refers to the experiences of colonization and discrimination faced by Indigenous People in contemporary times. The literature on indigeneity demonstrates that issues related to the indigenous status of a group often emerge when the group experiences systematic discrimination and exclusion from political power by the larger society that controls the state (Joseph, 2018; Gilang et al., 2023). Therefore, using the demands of IPOB as a case study, this research will explore how imbalances in ethnic representation within Nigeria's politics is fuelling sentiments of indigenousness and demands for self-determination by ethnonationalist groups.

1.1 Background to the Study

The amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British colonial power was met with protests from different people who were forced to live together without taking into consideration their differences in languages and cultures (Badmus 2009). Among various ethnic groups that were brought together in Nigeria were the Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Igala, Idoma, Jukun, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Edo, and several other smaller groups. The Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo established their domination in the Northern, Southern and Eastern regions of Nigeria, respectively. At independence in 1960, fear of these three major groups' domination in their respective regions led to ethnic minority agitations anchored on calls for the creation of more states to avoid the spectre of domination. The country which had only three regions at independence in 1960 has now developed into thirty-six states and a Federal Capital Territory (Adeleke et al, 2015).

The Nigerian state has since its emergence, been struggling with the challenges of how to coalesce the numerous ethnic nationalities in the country into one united country. According to Ali et al (2018), even the British colonial governments that ruled Nigeria indirectly using the tripod 'majority' ethnic arrangement of Hausa-Fulani of the North, Yoruba of the West, and Igbo of the East, were aware of the likely consequence of merging such diverse people. The challenge of forging national unity among the different ethnic nationalities has often been compounded by the inability of successive governments to address the problems associated with citizenship, religion, ethnicity, inequality, resource distribution, native-settler dichotomy, and national development (Agbigboa 2017). As argued by Badmus (2006), the fallout among

ethnic groups has not only promoted disunity and mistrust among Nigerians, but has also manifested in the resentful disposition towards the Nigerian state exhibited by those ethnic nationalities that feel disadvantaged and aggrieved.

Thus, separatist agitations, which have been a regular feature of Nigerian politics, still constitute a tool for the expression of discontent with the Nigerian state (Adetoye 2015). The nature of Nigeria's politics has fuelled the rise of separatist movements such the Odua People's Congress (OPC), a group with Yoruba ethnic interest, Arewa People's Congress, a pro- Hausa-Fulani organization, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), a forum for the Niger-Delta ethnic extraction, and the Boko Haram, a radical extremist group from Northeast Nigeria (Guichaoua, Y. 2009, Ajala 2018). According to Tamuno (2012), unequal power and minimal ethnic diversity in Nigeria's power politics has constantly threatened the continued existence of the Nigerian state. Consequently, the conflicts emanating from secession and self-determination demands are key issues that the Nigerian state is struggling to overcome.

1.2 IPOB and the Evolving Demands for Secession

Following Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, Ralph Nwasurike, an Igbo Indian-trained lawyer, founded the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). MASSOB aimed to peacefully achieve its goals through a 25-stage action plan (Hassan 2017). However, Nwasurike was arrested and accused of treason by the Nigerian government, leading to the formation of a splinter group called the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, an Igbo resident in the UK. IPOB emerged in response to claims that Nwasurike had aligned with the Nigerian state after his release in 2007 (Akinyetun 2018).

After former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan's[2] unsuccessful re-election attempt in 2015, won by General Muhammed Buhari from Northern Nigeria, IPOB intensified its protests in the Southeast (Ibid). Nnamdi Kanu established an unauthorized Radio Biafra, broadcasting worldwide (Francis 2017). Despite attempts by the Nigerian government to monitor Radio Biafra's transmissions, IPOB continued its activities, citing justifications such as the historical

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[2] Goodluck Jonathan served as the president of Nigeria between 2010 and 2015. Although Jonathan is from the South-South region of Nigeria, the Igbo people of the Southeast and other Southern Nigerians gave him a lot of support because they are from the Southern part of the country. In the 2015 presidential election, Mohammadu Buhari, who is from the northern part of Nigeria, defeated Jonathan in his ambition to retain his position as a Nigerian president.

sovereignty of the Igbo people before British colonialism. IPOB's demands have included secession and self-determination.

1.3   Statement of the problem

The Nigerian Civil War (1960-1970), which is said to have claimed over 3 million lives, occurred between the Biafran-Separatist agitators of the Igbo-speaking Southeastern region of Nigeria, known as 'the Biafran Army', and the Nigerian armed forces. Despite numerous constitutional reviews aimed at addressing the factors that led to the war, and the differences among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, none of these constitutional reviews were able to adequately address the underlying issues.

The proliferation of separatist organizations in Nigeria raises questions about the factors responsible for this development. According to Bammeke and Awosika (2022), the reasons put forth by various separatist groups, each making different demands on the Nigerian state, are rooted in the perception of injustice and marginalization of their respective ethnic groups within the Nigerian political system. Ibeanu, Orji, and Iwuamadi (2016) argued that the emergence of IPOB in Southeast Nigeria is linked to the collective feeling of victimization of the Igbo ethnic group by the Nigerian state before, during, and after the Biafran war (1967-1970).

As a result, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) continue their agitations to secede from Nigeria based on various claims. These claims, which include the marginalization of the Igbo people, are believed to have not been adequately addressed by the Nigerian government. This ongoing situation has led to daily extrajudicial killings and human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria, necessitating a thorough assessment.

1.4   Research Questions

The thesis attempts to answer the following questions:

a) What are the core factors responsible for the Nigeria-IPOB conflict in Southeast Nigeria?

b) To what extent do the responses of the IPOB to the perceived marginalization represents the views of the Igbo ethnic minority in Nigeria?

c) How have IPOB agitations affected peace in the Nigerian state?

1.5   Objectives of the study

The issue of separatist demands has been at the forefront of Nigerian national consciousness in recent times and has been a source of concern to the Nigerian government and the international community. The unity and the notion of statehood have come under stress and strains following the actions of the separatist movements in the Southeast geopolitical zone. This study, therefore, intends to:

a) Identify the factors that are triggering the IPOB activities in the Southeast Nigeria.
b) Explain the basic demands of the IPOB and how they relate with the aspiration of Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.
c) Identify and discuss the challenges that the Nigeria-IPOB conflict has posed to the peace and unity of the Nigerian state.

1.6   Significance of the study

This study has significance not only in terms of its immediate focus on the Nigerian-IPOB conflict but also as a contribution to the academic understanding of separatism, identity politics, and conflict resolution, with a case study that can be used for comparative analysis in academic research. By delving into the historical and socio-political context of the Nigeria-IPOB conflict, the study also contributes to understanding the root causes of separatism movements.

In the context of indigenous identity and self-determination, exploring how IPOB's adoption of indigenous identity shapes their demands for self-determination provides insights into the role of identity politics in separatist movements. Lastly, examining the Nigerian government's response to IPOB's demands and how it prolongs the conflict contributes to the broader field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Lessons from this case can inform strategies to mitigate and resolve separatist conflicts in other regions.

1.7   Scope of the Study

Even though this thesis discusses the historical development of separatist demands in Nigeria, the scope of this study is limited to the southeast geopolitical area of Nigeria between 2012 and 2021. The year 2012 witnessed the formation of the IPOB organization as a splinter of MASSOB. The year 2017 marks the year the group was designated a terrorist organization by the Nigerian government under the Nigerian Terrorism Act. In 2021, the group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, was arrested by the Nigerian authority in Kenya. This research examines the

sociopolitical evolution of Nigeria from its earliest days to the point which could be said to be the year that separatist organisations seized sub-nationalism's manifestation in 2021.

1.8   Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter One serves as a general introduction, providing background information for the study. This chapter offers an overview of the topics subsequently discussed. Chapter Two delves into the context of the research, exploring contemporary analyses of Nigeria's neighbouring countries undergoing similar conflicts. It examines how Igbo ethnic nationalism led to the radicalization and evolution of IPOB, and reviews relevant existing literature.

Chapter Three serves as the methodology chapter, outlining the methods of data collection and detailing the process of obtaining data through unstructured interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGD). Chapter Four elaborates on basic concepts such as secession and self-determination, along with the theoretical framework of the study. The Primary Right and Remedial Right theories are discussed and linked to the study.

Chapter Five discusses the historical development of the Nigerian civil war. This chapter also assesses the prospects of post-war peacebuilding efforts and the rise of separatist demands, spanning from the suspension of democracy by the Nigerian military until its reinstatement in 1999. Chapter Six presents the data and analyses the major findings. Finally, Chapter Seven comprises the general discussion, conclusion, and suggestions for future research.

2 The Research Context and Literature Review

Given the conditions for colonial state construction, separatist movements are becoming a tradition in Africa. Thus, different reasons are responsible for the growth of the said tradition. In this section, I review different claims that have led to separatist demands in contemporary Nigeria's neighbouring countries. As such, there is a wide range of written materials that is relevant to discussions of separatist agitations in Nigeria. And, since many of the issues that influenced separatist demands that gave rise to the Biafra War, which lasted from 1967 to 1970, have not been addressed, it is thought that the conflict is the origin of IPOB's current separatist activities.

2.1 Separatist Demands in Nigeria's Neighbouring Countries: Fundamental Claims and Perspectives

It is argued that West African communities have stronger attachments to their ethnicity than to their governments, making national integration extremely challenging (Wallerstein 1960). Due to this idea, West Africa is experiencing a faster growth in calls for autonomy and separatist demands than the entirety of Northern and Southern Africa, except Ethiopia. While several fundamental justifications are offered to support these self-determination and separatist goals, this paper evaluates three other West African countries that are also experiencing an increase in secessionist pressure.

2.1.1 The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) Separatist Demand in Mali

The Tuareg people are a transnational ethnic group found in different African countries such as Mali, Algeria, Libya, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Just like the Sami indigenous people who are predominantly reindeer herders in the Nordic countries of Northern Europe, the Tuareg people are traditionally pastoralists who fought French colonization but later had to submit to superior power. Lecoq and Flute (2013) gave three distinctions to Tuareg separatist agitations: first, the division of the ancestral territory of the Tuareg into five distinct postcolonial republics. The second is that, although there has been no official irredentism, that is, no structural attempts to unify all Tuaregs into a single territorial state, secessionism among the Tuareg of Mali and Niger is strong enough to have led to armed rebellions in these nations. Third, the National

Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), an independence movement in Mali in 2012, brought about the official issue of national independence. However, as of August 2014, to ease the conflict, the French military mission has expanded to a regional emphasis under the name Operation Barkhane with 4,000 troops (Sangaré and McSparren 2018). As a result, numerous soldiers, including UN peacekeepers, have died because of the fighting between the Malian government and the UN peacekeepers on the one side, and regional separatist organizations (Hassan 2017).

2.1.2   The *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance*[3] (MFDC) Separatist Demand in Senegal

Another interaction between a nation-state and a subnational minority is the fight for Casamance to become an independent state from Senegal. According to Engelbert (2015), Casamance was administered separately from Senegal between 1854 and 1939 by the French West Africa governor. However, the colonial authority unified Casamance and Senegal into a single nation-state thereafter. As a result, the MFDC was first established in 1947 to advocate for the independence of the Senegalese state without any separatist intentions, even though it is said that Casamance's independence was going to be discussed later (Engelbert, 2015). Since then, the MFDC has been pushing for the creation of a separate Casamance state, and as a result, it is claimed that the separatist group has used violence against the state. According to Foucher (2011), Senegal instead adopts a 'hearts and minds' strategy, hoping to co-opt the separatists and strengthen them through an extensive peace process that exacerbates tensions within the rebel movement. While the conflict is still ongoing, one could claim that the peace process established by the Senegalese government failed as anticipated. Consequently, as claimed by Hassan (2017), a confrontation between the Senegalese government and separatist agitators created a regional unrest which has resulted in the deaths of 5,000 people and the displacement of over 60,000 people from various localities.

2.1.3   The Ambazonia Movement (AM) Separatist demand in Cameroon

The state of Cameroon stands noteworthy because it was colonized by both the British and the French. Therefore, the country is more divided along the lines of colonial languages,

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[3] *Mouvement des Forces Dé-mocratiques de Casaman* are French words that could be literarily translated to mean Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casaman. Senegal's official language is French, being the former colony of France.

Francophone, and Anglophone, than their ethnic differences, making separatist agitations in Cameroon distinctive. Even though French and English are both official languages in Cameroon, school children have to learn both. According to Mbuagbo (2002), inter-ethnic oppression, discrimination, and dominance by the majority French speakers over the minority English speakers, are all factors causing anger in Camerron. Hence, Wongbi Blaise argued that it wasn't until 1990, when the multi-party system was reinstated and was distinguished by freedom of mass communication and association, in contrast to the previous regime of Ahmadou Ahidjo, that the Anglophone elite seized the chance to make their grievances officially heard. They demanded constitutional amendments with some groups promoting secessionist ideas, and the Ambazonia Movement (AM) demands a separate state (Wongbi 2022). Thus, the marginalization of English speakers is therefore widely believed to be a contributing factor to the separatist movements for an imagined Ambazonia state on the present territory of Cameroon. English speakers not only feel marginalized because of the language they speak, but also because they do not understand the language their leaders and other officials speak and use in writing, French[4].

2.2   The IPOB Separatist Activities in Nigeria: The Fundamental Claims

Ethnic nationalists' main argument is that shared identity, which typically includes a common language, shared religion, history, and ancestry, defines nations (Fozdar and Low, 2015). As Harris (2009) argued, "Identity offers an illusion of the uniqueness of, and therefore a destiny for, a particular group, and violence is an illusion in that its force can and will achieve a desired destiny" (p 128). Therefore, it is believed that the Igbo ethnic group, situated in the Southeastern territory of Nigeria, perceives their collective identity as being under threat due to the prevailing sense of marginalization within Nigeria's political framework. In the specific context of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, it appears that loyalty to the ethnic group often takes precedence over loyalty to the Nigerian state. Consequently, it is a prevalent belief among many Nigerians that the country's unity is sustained based on what each group believes it can gain through the accumulation process, rather than through any inherent psychological or constitutional alignment with the nation's goals and objectives (Uche and Okonkwo 2020). Therefore, it is thought that whenever a group's access to this political accumulation process is

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[4] For a better understanding of the secessionist demand in Cameroon, see Wongbi's Ph.D. dissertation, titled: Separatism in Ambazonia and its Countering: https://is.muni.cz/th/zbu27/MU_Dissertation.pdf

restricted or denied, the affected group sometimes invokes a phenomenon known as 'marginalization'.
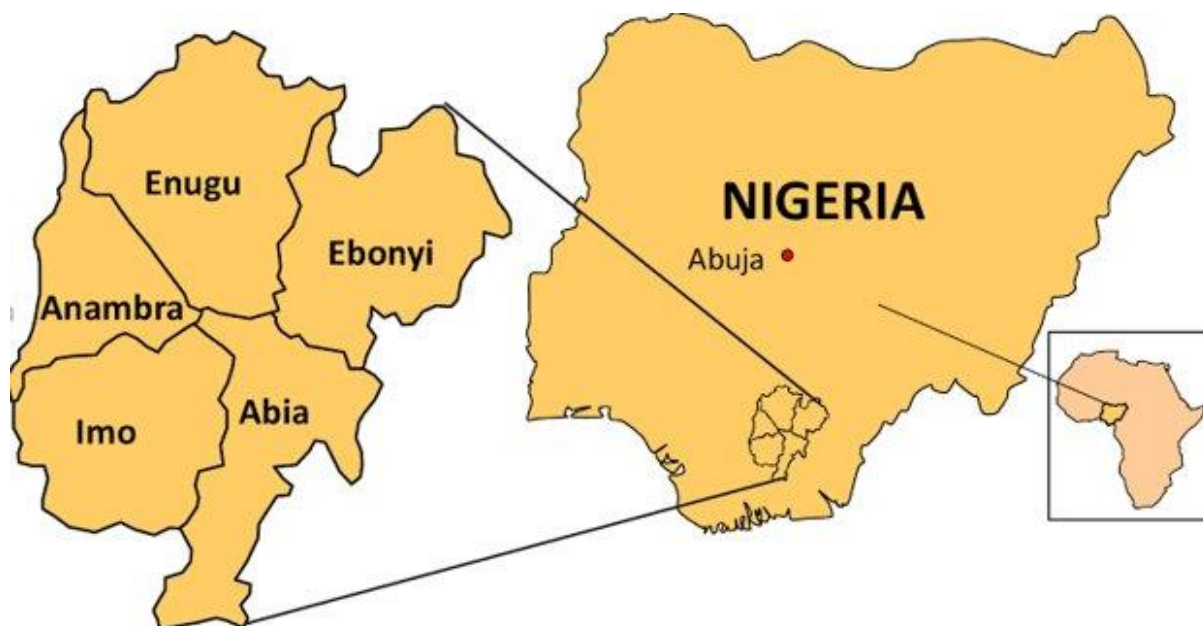
Figure 1: The Map of Southeast Igbo Territory of Nigeria: Source: Ogonna Osuofor (2021)

2.3   Reactivation of the Igbo Ethnic Nationalism

The '*Ohanaeze Ndigbo*' is a socio-political indigenous Igbo organization that has been championing the course of Igbo nationalism for many decades. Especially before Nigeria's fourth republic which started in 1999, *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* has maintained the leading and unified Igbo ethnic organization that every Igbo person admires (Nwangwu et al 2020). To start with, the *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* petitioned the Human Rights Violations Investigation Committee (Known in Nigeria as Oputa Panel) to investigate the human rights violations that took place under the military regimes[5]. The Igbo-social organization claimed before the panel that, "Ndi Igbo have been systematically disempowered in all spheres and excluded from all top echelons of governance in the Nigerian polity, despite the popular slogan of the Nigerians during the civil war that "to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done." (Ohanaeze 1999, pp 9). The document presented by the Ohanaeze Ndigbo spelled out the marginalization of the Igbo ethnic

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[5] The panel popularly called The Oputa Panel was constituted in 1999 by the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo. The basic assignment given to the committee was to provide the detailed injustices perpetrated by the military interregnum between 1984 and 1999 in Nigeria. While the committee's report was expected to be useful in national integration and unification of the conflicting ethnic divisions in Nigeria, the report of the panel has not been implemented since 2002.

group. However, the petition sounds more appealing and emotional, hence the need for more inclusive organizations to collaborate with the existing ones. It is said that the lingering concern of the Igbo people not to be further excluded in the re-democratization terrain of a competitive multinational Nigeria, implied that the Igbo ethnic group needed a more proactive and youthful-oriented organization. It is against this backdrop that MASSOB was formed in 1999 to take over from the *Ohanaeze Ndigbo*.

2.4   The MASSOB

The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was established as a non-violent Igbo-ethnic group aiming to raise awareness among Igbo youth about their position within Nigeria. Led by Ralph Uwazuruike, a young Igbo lawyer trained in India, MASSOB presented the "Biafra Bill of Rights" to the UN in New York, 1999, outlining their peaceful intentions in the pursuit of Biafran sovereignty (Daily Trust 2021). According to Uwazuruike (2004), the document presented by MASSOB highlighted instances of Igbo exclusion from Nigerian social and political life, attributing this to politics of marginalization and alleging that the Hausa-Fulani majority hindered Igbo progress.

MASSOB's approach gained traction among Igbo traders, artisans, workers, and youths across urban centres, particularly in the former eastern region. However, the organization faced challenges both externally and internally. According to Human Rights Watch (2002) The Nigerian government questioned its activities, leading to arrests, killing of MASSOB members by the Nigerian security and accusations of other violence against protesters (cited by Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada). Internally, leadership conflicts emerged, with allegations of financial mismanagement and fraud against Uwazuruike (Daily Post, 2014). Disagreements regarding the use of non-violence within MASSOB led to a split, culminating in the formation of a new separatist group, laying the foundation for the emergence of IPOB.

2.5   The Indigenous People of Biafra - IPOB

In 2012, a UK-based British Nigerian citizen founded the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). According to Ojo (2023), "the clashes with the MASSOB by the Nigerian security forces and his [Uwazuruike, the MASSOB leader] arrest doused the renewal of agitation for independence. The demise of MASSOB prompted the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Ojo 2023, pp 2). There is a battery of evidence that IPOB was formed as a

reaction to the perceived exclusion of the Igbo ethnic group in the national consciousness of Nigeria. Successive Nigerian governments have been widely criticized for being uneven in the distribution of the Nigerian state's economic and political commonwealth. As such, ethnic minorities often refer to the prevalent underdevelopment, poverty, and insufficiency of basic social amenities in their area as palpable evidence of being marginalized, deprived, and unwanted. Therefore, it is thought that IPOB was created after some thorough consultations with the Igbo stakeholders and new-Biafra advocates, most especially, those in the diaspora, to demand a better Nigeria, and if this is not achievable, a Biafran state (Jacob et al 2020). Pursuant to the objectives, IPOB has developed into an ethnic-based organization that operates under an elaborate structure. This structure is captured in the diagram below.
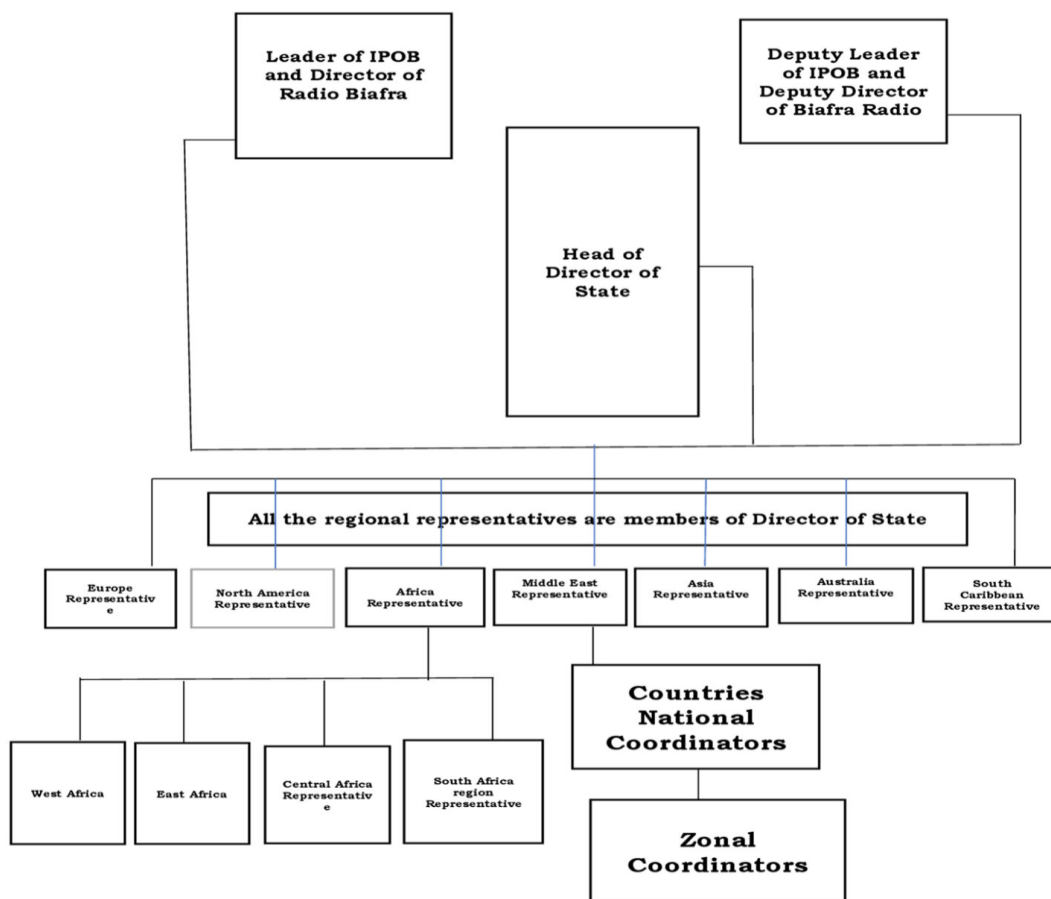
Figure 2: IPOB's Structural Organization. Source: J. S. Ojo (2023)

2.6   The Position of the Nigerian Constitution on Secession

The role of constitutions in governing states encompasses varying approaches to secession rights within democratic states. While some constitutions allow for territorial self-determination and secession, such as the Soviet Constitution, Slovakia, and the Ethiopian Constitution of 1994 (Sunstein 1991, Osterland 1993), the Nigerian Constitution, originating from the colonial era, does not include provisions for secession. The absence of secession rights in Nigeria's constitutions, including the 1999 Constitution, has been a contentious issue. The Nigerian state, backed by legal frameworks like the Criminal Code Acts, actively prevents any attempts to challenge the country's unity or call for secession. To be sure, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, Section 2 (1), states that: "Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state to be known by the name Federal Republic of Nigeria"[6]. Besides this, the Nigerian state, under the Nigerian Criminal Code, also prevents individuals or groups from questioning the unity of Nigeria or calling for secession.

The absence of popular referenda on the constitution reflects a top-down approach, where the constitution's content is imposed without public input. As argued by Julius Ihonvere, "the hallmark of imposed, elite-driven or top-down constitutions is that they are never subjected to popular debates or referenda" (Ihonvere 2000, pp 346). Notably, Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the IPOB, faced charges, including 'treason', highlighting the severe consequences, including the death penalty, for advocating secession in Nigeria (Punch Nigeria, 2021). In effect, treason basically entails the death penalty in Nigeria.

2.7   The Position of African Union (AU) on Secession

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) transformed to the African Union (AU) in 2002. Founded in 1963, the OAU aimed to unify Africa, liberate it from colonialism, and enhance peace and security. It is also important to note that OAU was confronted with the problem of having to preserve the colonial borders to prevent conflicts and wars in Africa. Thus, the AU, established in 2002 with 53 member states, focuses on African solutions for African problems (Fafore 2016). Unlike the OAU, the AU emphasizes continental integration, political cohesion, and economic cooperation among African states. The AU's foundational charter, the

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[6] See the Nigerian Constitution as amended: https://constitution.lawnigeria.com/2018/03/26/first-amendment-1999-constitution-of-nigeria/

Constitutive Act, doesn't address secession explicitly but upholds principles of territorial integrity and non-interference. Critics have questioned the AU's stance on African peoples' right to self-determination or secession. The challenges of preserving colonial borders to prevent conflicts, leading to references to the Africa Charter of Human and Peoples Rights in cases involving national minorities against their states. Article 20(1) of the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples Rights stated in part, that "all peoples shall have right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination (Africa Charter, Article 20(1). Also, Article 4(g) of the AU's Constitutive Act emphasizes "non-interference by any Member State in the internal affairs of another" as a tenet of the Union (The AU Constitutive Act, 2012).

It could be argued that ethnic minorities in Africa often used self-determination as a basis for secession demands, with South Sudan being a rare successful example. Despite AU restructuring, ongoing separatist movements persist across African nations (Okeke and Lubisi 2020). The continuity of leaders from African states to the African Union suggests that ethnic minority separatist agitations are likely to continue due to vested interests and overlapping roles (Duffield 1984). Indeed, there are doubts regarding the legality of separatist demands in Africa according to AU document. While it acknowledges "self-determination", explicit mention of "secession" is lacking. The African Union generally discourages separatist movements and advocates for peaceful resolution of internal conflicts among member states through dialogue, negotiation, and mediation.

2.8   Literature Review

In this section, I will draw attention to a few literary works that provide an explanation of the separatist demands of the Southeastern region in Nigeria. The conclusion of the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970) is often regarded to have resolved the question of Nigeria's territorial integrity and unity. Even though it seems like the Igbo are at the centre of every argument, I look at existing knowledge about the reasons behind the conflicts that gave rise to IPOB.

2.8.1   Economic Dominance by the Majority Ethnic Groups

Nnoli's study (1995) highlights the economic strangulation of the Igbo ethnic group during the First Republic's Northern-dominated federal administration. Significant projects under the First National Development Plan (1962–1968) were allocated to Northern Nigeria, excluding the

Igbo region. Achebe (1983) contends that the exclusion of the Igbo from federally owned projects and industries. He questions the construction of steel mills exclusively in the North and West, neglecting the East. Achebe (1983) argues that the manipulation of revenue-sharing agreements and insufficient allocation of capital projects isolate the Igbo.

Ikpeze (2000) notes deliberate efforts to hinder Igbo economic recovery post-civil war. He argued that Awolowo[7] imposed a 20-pound cap on Biafran bank accounts (the banks opened in Igboland during the war), impeding the Igbo's ability to rebuild (cited in Amadiume & An-Na'im, 2000). The alteration of the principle of derivation by Decree No. 13 of 1970, eliminating it as a revenue-sharing criterion, further disadvantaged the Igbo. Ken Saro-Wiwa (1992) argues that the military dictatorship revised revenue allocation, reducing regions from where oil was extracted to 20% from mining rent and royalties, favouring the Hausa-Fulani ethnic majority. This structural imbalance reinforced economic disparities in Nigeria.

2.8.2 Separatist Demands as a Reaction to Economic Deprivation

Adekson (2004) posited that MASSOB rekindled separatist demands in response to the alleged economic and political marginalization of the Igbo people in Nigeria. The group sees itself as the vanguard advocating for Igbo interests. Many initiatives for comprehensive development in the Southeast, according to Adekson, often result in the explicit disenfranchisement and systematic exclusion of the Igbo territory within Nigeria. Uwazuruike (2004) asserts that Biafra represents a battle, symbol, and mission to liberate the Igbo from societal and economic exclusion, seeking identity and belonging. It embodies the consciousness of a people compelled to live in a nation scarcely defending their rights—a protest long-term, systematic marginalization. Uwazuruike claims that the August 26, 2004, protest instilled panic in the Nigerian government, leading to the group's successful internationalization. By May 2005, MASSOB organized protests in France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and other countries, unsettling the Nigerian government. However, Chukwuemeka Ojukwu disagreed with Uwazuruike's approach. In a January 15, 2001, interview with *TELL Magazine*, Ojukwu acknowledged Uwazuruike's goals for Igbo emancipation but questioned the wisdom of his actions. Ojukwu

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[7] Obafemi Awolowo was a prominent political figure in Western Nigeria (Yoruba ethnic group), and Nigeria's finance minister after the civil war.

(2001) praised Uwazuruike's courage yet advocated a more subtle approach, emphasizing the importance of separatist demands rooted in spirit and mind, eschewing confrontation.

2.8.3 Refreshing Memory of the Civil War (1967-1970)

Onuoha (2013) notes that separatist organizations perceive the Nigerian Civil War as an Ibo struggle for national independence, rejecting Nigeria's portrayal of the Biafra War as the sole and accurate perspective to comprehend the conflict. Uwalaka (2003) argued that the civil war profoundly impacted Ibo psychology, self-awareness, and economic well-being, all encapsulated in the widely used term "marginalization." Olaniyan and Johnson (2017) aim to discern the roots of renewed separatist movements in Nigeria, specifically the resurgent Biafra agitations in the Southeast. They identify the political dominance of the North over the South since the war, isolating the southeastern region. Olaniyan and Johnson (2017) particularly highlight the memory of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and President Mohammadu Buhari's role, which rekindled old wounds for the Ibo people, making them perceive Buhari as a longstanding adversary. This perception aligns with Celestine et al (2023), who claim Buhari overlooked Ibo individuals in his cabinet appointments, leading ethnic-based organizations like IPOB to demand separation. The Ibo people often assert they hold less political influence than other ethnic groups due to the post-civil war landscape. According to Omo Omoruyi in TELL Magazine (1999), the Ibo, once a dominant ethnic group in the military, have been reduced to a marginalized minority in both the military and politics. Chuckwurah et al (2022) argue that while IPOB's provocative language escalates ethnic tensions in Southeast Nigeria, former President Buhari's statement to handle separatist agitators in 'the language they understand' triggers disturbing memories of the civil war (1967-1970).

2.8.4 Separatist Demand Influenced by the Perception of Victimization

Various writers have highlighted the persistent separatist activities in Southeast Nigeria, attributing them to a perception of ongoing victimization. Obasi (2015) argues that the region's inadequate infrastructure and high youth unemployment fuel these activities. He contends that the Nigerian federal government's failure to properly restore the area after the 1967-1970 war, despite peacebuilding efforts like Reconciliation, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation, contributes to these grievances. While Goodluck Jonathan's administration provided a renewed sense of belonging to the Igbo people, Obasi (2015) criticizes Muhammadu Buhari's government of further mistreating the Igbo.

Owoeye et al (2022) add that the continued detention of IPOB leaders and other Igbo nationalists amounts to further victimization. They propose that the Federal Government should address this by adopting a just federal character system, including rotating the Nigerian presidency among all six geopolitical zones and eliminating the Southern and Northern divide. Releasing detained leaders could partially alleviate agitation, according to Owoeye et al (2022).

2.8.5   Elite Perspectives to IPOB Demands

Frank (1979) identifies two fundamental ideologies shaping the Nigerian state: the local populist perspective and the elite nationalist viewpoint. This ideological clash generates unhealthy conflict within the state. While nationalist elites aim to maintain national unity and federal authority, the local populist class emphasizes ethnicity and tribal politics. Ibeanu et al (2016) further differentiate Igbo elites into inclusivists and radical separatists. Inclusivists focus on enhancing Igbo political and economic inclusion within Nigeria, viewing it as the solution to oppression. Radical separatists advocate aggressive separation demands, representing a more confrontational approach to address Igbo concerns.

Nwangwu et al (2020) categorize Igbo nationalists into two generations. The first generation, termed 'petty bourgeoisie,' emerged post the 1970 Nigerian Civil War, advocating for Igbo recognition within Nigeria, guided by the concept of "ako-nu-uche." In contrast, the later generation, beginning in 1999 with Nigeria's re-democratization, is more confrontational, aligning with popular sentiments for separation.

2.9   Summary

A lot has been said about separatist movements and calls for self-determination throughout Africa. In this part, I discussed the dynamics of separatist aspirations in three countries that are close to Nigeria because these demands have grown common in modern African societies. Furthermore, the conventional and legal stances of a relevant organizations regarding separatist demands were reviewed, such as the African Unity (AU) and the Nigerian Constitution. More importantly, the issue of Nigerian federalism was examined, because it is mostly argued that Nigeria's version of federalism did not fit conveniently with its aspiration for national integration. However, this section primarily discussed the Nigerian contexts for separatist demands as well as the relevant writing on the topic.

The section on methods is the next chapter. In this section, I go over how I get the qualitative data I needed for the research. In order to address the research questions formulated for this study, I described in detail the open procedures used during the process of obtaining information through face-to-face interviews and targeted focus groups discussions. These procedures have certain limitations as well, which I also noted.

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology that I used to gather data for this study. Based on the objectives of the study, which are: What are the core factors responsible for the continuous separatist agitations in Southeast Nigeria? To what extent do the responses of the IPOB to the perceived marginalization represents the views of the Igbo ethnic minority in Nigeria? To what extent have IPOB agitations affected peace in the Nigerian state? I employed a qualitative approach to data collection. In line with that, I used qualitative methods such as qualitative interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGD). Furthermore, the study relies on an account of the history of the conflict, which have been extensively covered in numerous publications and in Nigerian newspapers. This makes data from secondary sources relevant to include in the study.

I chose the qualitative approach in this study to meet and interact with members of the IPOB organization in their respective locations in the study are, Southeast Nigeria, and to gather first-hand account of underlying concerns of the group. This methodology section also highlights some of the challenges I encountered during the data gathering process, the ethical consideration I made, as well as reflections on my positionality.

3.1 Study Area

Southeast Nigeria encompasses the Igbo-speaking territory within the Nigerian state, comprising five of the country's 36 political units: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. The Igbo ethnic group represents one of Nigeria's three major ethnic divisions. Unlike the other two major groups, the Hausa and the Yoruba, who also inhabit other African countries, the Igbo are uniquely indigenous to Nigeria and are not found as a native population in any other nation worldwide (Nwoye 2011). According to Adeyemi (2022), the population of Southeast Nigeria is approximately 22 million people, constituting 10% of the country's total population. It is widely known that the Igbo ethnic group is the most geographically dispersed ethnic minority in Nigeria, primarily due to their extensive trading activities. Consequently, Igbo individuals are present throughout various Nigerian states, with a significant number residing in cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, and Akure in the Southwestern region of the country.

The group under assessment, IPOB, operates as an ethnic-based organization spanning not just one community, but multiple communities across five Nigerian states within the Igboland. With this broad scope in mind, I initially envisioned selecting a community or city with a significant number of individuals actively involved in the agitations. Considering the five states comprising southeastern Nigeria, I chose Abia State for several reasons. Firstly, the state has a historical background of anti-colonial resistance. Additionally, Abia State bears significant remnants of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), which many scholars consider the foundation of separatist movements in Nigeria. To further narrow down the focus, I selected the city of Umuahia within Abia State. My choice was influenced by the fact that the city is the hometown of the study group's 'supreme' leader, Nnamdi Kanu. According to insiders, the group's leader is warmly welcomed in the city whenever he visits Nigeria from the UK, where he is based. I was also informed that Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the study group, is frequently accompanied by numerous supporters and group members whenever he arrives in Umuahia. Taking all these factors into account, I believe that gathering data within this population will be advantageous for the study.

Furthermore, the city of Umuahia serves as a central market hub for both its residents and those from other Southeast Nigerian states, boasting a population of approximately 360,000 inhabitants as of the 2006 population census. Within the Umuahia metropolis lies the Afara Ukwu Community, where the leader of the group resides. During my fieldwork, I visited the leader's home and observed the damaged cars that belonged to him and other IPOB members on the day the Nigerian Army (part of Operation Python Dance) arrived to arrest him. Focusing on the study populace of Umuahia provided me with a multifaceted view of the situation. It allowed me to track the Nigerian government's efforts to control the group's leadership tightly, while also witnessing how IPOB's supporters resisted government attempts to suppress their protests.

3.2 Preparation for the Fieldwork

In preparation for my fieldwork in Nigeria, it was essential to consider the challenges of gathering information in an area where I couldn't speak the local language or blend in easily. To overcome this hurdle, I enlisted the assistance of a gatekeeper in the study area. A 'gatekeeper,' as defined by Lavrakas (2008), is an individual who acts as a liaison between the researcher and potential respondents. In this case, a Ph.D. candidate from an institution in

southeast Nigeria volunteered to be my gatekeeper. I intentionally chose someone with an academic background to ensure that the local community understood that my presence was solely for academic research purposes. This was especially crucial given that the group I was studying, IPOB, was under state security surveillance.

The gatekeeper informed me of how sensitive the group under the study was, hence, he linked me up with some key respondents, some of whom I had contacted before my arrival in Nigeria. It is important to recognize that there may be power dynamics between the gatekeeper, researcher, and research subjects that have the potential to affect the interview (Bryman 2015). Although I acknowledge the contribution of my gatekeeper during the fieldwork, I prevented any influence that could negatively affect the outcome of the research, I mostly appeared with my respondents during the interview session without the presence of my gatekeeper.

3.3   Access to Informants and translators

Given that I didn't speak the language of the ethnic group under study, it was my responsibility to find individuals familiar with both the language and the study environment. Initially, my gatekeeper introduced me to a tricycle rider who agreed to serve as an informant. This informant had the advantage of operating on the main streets and corners, enabling us to navigate the neighbourhood effectively. He could identify members of the study group and knew how to contact them. However, gaining access to participants proved challenging due to the sensitivity and security concerns surrounding the research topic. As emphasized by Feldman et al. (2004), the researcher had the duty to persuade knowledgeable participants to participate in the study.

Although, research informants and translators are argued against. Bryman (2012) argues that if fieldwork assistants and translators are non-professionals, it could be harmful to the study because they might not be able to convey the necessary concepts while translating. In lieu of this, I did not have a separate translator to reduce the risk of misconceptions and I could not also do without having any insiders. Consequently, my informants took on the role of translators, because all the research participants are encouraged to speak the English language or communicate in 'pidgin English'. And I, as a researcher, understand and could speak 'pidgin English'. Even though I observe my respondents could communicate very well in the English language, the privileged of switching to localized 'pidgin' English influenced the free flow of our conversation.

3.4   Methods of Data Collection

This study adopts both Focused Group Discussions (FDG) and semi-structured interview methods. Since the data for this research are collected from three different categories (the IPOB members, the Igbo ethnic group, and the Nigerian security forces), each of the two methods is considered depending on how neatly it corresponds with the data category.

3.4.1   Focused Group Discussion

The methods adopted for data collection in this research are considered based on the research questions. However, one of the research questions is to know the extent to which the group under study represents the aspiration of the Igbo ethnic population. To this motive, the perspective of the Igbo ethnic group which the separatist group claims to represent needs to be known. Therefore, this research adopts the Focused Group Discussion (FDG) to understand the views of the Igbo ethnic population towards the separatist group, and it is argued that this method is easy to analyse when a study area is large. According to Bryman, the FDG is a type of interview that involves multiple people discussing a single subject or theme (Bryman 2012). Using the FGD method, allows the researcher to cover many of the study population in groups. Hence, the ability of respondents to confirm their own statements and raise fresh points that are beneficial to the research, gives this approach the additional benefit of enabling the researcher to delve deeply into the topic under discussion.

Essentially, as I, the researcher, is not an insider, observing the reactions of respondents to any question could be made easy through a group discussion. Thus, it is believed that the FGD method avails the respondents to critique the perspectives of one another, which of course would broaden the knowledge of the researcher on any question that is asked. It is noteworthy, however, that research of this nature with cultural and historical connotation requires group verification, because the researcher is an outsider with limited familiarity with their past, hence respondents themselves could verify what is true and what is false. Therefore, gathering individuals from different spaces for a focused group discussion could have been hard for me to achieve, however, I utilized the public market where Igbo people assembled to conduct the FGD. Traditionally, trading is the major occupation of the Igbo ethnic group, and I was informed they go to their major markets almost every day. I was able to speak with a female cloth seller about the purpose of my research, and she assisted me to organize a group of 8 fellow marketers that comprises six (6) males and two (2) females. Having organized the group

discussion, I introduced the topic to the group's members and shared the interview guide with them. I told them their voices will be recorded and I also shared with them the consent form. After going through the consent form and interview guide, they all agreed to participate in the FGD. Furthermore, I shared my phone number and email address with them and informed them about their right to withdraw their consent even after the discussions.[8]

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interview

In what follows, the aim of the research is to give an in-depth understanding of the conflict. Meanwhile, qualitative research is highly emphasized in social research because it encouraged interviewing the direct actors for emic perspectives. The purpose of the face-to-face interview is to get the 'social cues' which means additional understanding of the research topic such as voice, intonation, body language, etc. of the respondents which would afford the interviewer the needed additional useful information that will add to the verbal answer of the interviewee on any question (Opdenakke, 2006). As argued by Bryman (2012), a semi-structured interview is "used so that the researcher can keep an open mind about the shape of what he or she needs to know about, so that concepts and theories can emerge out of the data." (p 10). Therefore, the justification for the qualitative research approach is that qualitative methods through the interview are appropriate for interpreting, defining, assessing, and getting in-depth knowledge. Consequently, the semi-structured interview I used in this study is to ensure a thorough evaluation of the topic under study.

Moreover, since the basic research questions and the follow-up questions for the respondents are clear and could be easily comprehended, I believed that the discussions between me, the researcher, and my respondents, would flow unhindered. Although Hennink (2020) observed that respondents often emphasize topics they consider important, even if these topics are not directly relevant to the research. To prevent the discussions from deviating off-topic, my interview guide was employed as a framework during the interview sessions. Despite this structure, I conducted the interviews with utmost respect and politeness, allowing participants to express themselves fully without interruptions. This approach ensured that the conversations remained focused and relevant to the research context.

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[8] See the subsection titled 'Going to the Fieldwork the Second Time', I discuss the process of gathering my FDG during my second time of going to the fieldwork.

3.5 Selection of Respondents

I considered several variables that determined my respondents, including the status of individuals who might make up the study population. Having this in mind, there are three categories of respondents from which the study seeks to elicit information; the study group, the larger Igbo ethnic group, and the officials of the Nigerian state (the Nigerian security officials to be specific) who are frequently at odds with the separatist group. Given that the separatist organization is comprised primarily of young individuals, I focused on the youth population when collecting data on the group. Thus, the mixture of young and old people with recognizable status in the community was considered when looking at data for the Igbo ethnic group, while information from Nigerian security officials was gathered based solely on their willingness to speak without regard to their age or rank. I visited one of the Police Stations in Umuahia for the purpose of getting useful data. Considering the foregoing, respondents are selected using the snowball sampling method. According to Bryman (2012), the snowball sampling method implies that "the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others" (p 202).

I decided to utilize both semi-structured and focused group interviews to get diverse information from various actors. Thus, respondents for the focused group discussion are the non-members of the IPOB, who are comfortable sitting in together to respond to the questions. Additionally, the interviewees' time is considered so they will not be in haste and give information that is not genuine. In consonant with the respondents' preferences, each interview segment is scheduled to last anywhere from ten minutes to an hour. Also, where the interview should take place largely depends on the respondents' convenience, thus, an open market space was used for the FGD.

However, in my first trip to the fieldwork, a total number of four (4) participants were engaged in the unstructured interviews, and one (1) Focus Group Discussion was held. In my second trip which I discuss below, I conducted eleven (11) more interviews and one (1) more FDG. In total, I had fifteen (15) interviews and two (2) FDGs. Although I complied with the ethical criterion of maintaining the anonymity of study participants, it is necessary to provide a brief description of individuals who utilized their responses to give a sense of who I will be quoting in the analysis chapter. Therefore, Respondents 1, 2, 3, 6, 14, and 15 are IPOB members while

Respondents 9, 11, 12 are elderly Igbo ethnic members. Respondent 7 is a community leader (Chief).

3.6   Written Sources

It might be thought that there is no amount of primary data gathered that could be sufficient for a thorough assessment of the topic under study. Relying upon this belief, this study rested on other written sources of data. To complement the primary data collected in the field through interviews. This research obtains data from published books, academic journals, and major Nigerian newspaper publications. Additionally, the secondary data used in this study included information from internet sources. I carefully chose a few reliable and diverse internet sources, keeping in mind that Nigeria as a country deal with a lot of fake news on social media. I recognized that social and print media could have provided accurate and direct information about the group, thus I selected my sources with care.

3.7   Reflexibility and Positionality

Reflexivity entails the incorporation of self-experience into the research process. According to Etherington (2007), reflexivity empowers the researcher to fulfil two roles: that of the inquirer and that of the respondent. As elucidated by Alcoff and Potter (1993), reflexivity compels us to confront our multiple identities, which act as representations of the fluid self within the research environment, the chosen research problem, and the individuals we engage with (cited in Lincoln and Guba 2011). It was impractical for me to achieve complete neutrality as a researcher. The concept of absolute objectivity in qualitative research has sparked debates among researchers. Bryman (2012) acknowledges the growing recognition that researchers cannot entirely suppress their views. Considering my role as a researcher, I engaged in self-reflection throughout the study. However, I couldn't position myself as a neutral respondent while identifying as a Nigerian citizen. During one instance, a respondent asked whether, as a Nigerian, I believed all ethnic groups in the country were treated equally. I refrained from offering direct answers to such questions. Instead, I emphasized the importance of their views over mine within the context of this research.

3.7.1   The Researcher as an Outsider

Nigeria is politically and religiously divided between the Muslim-dominated North and the Christian-dominated South. As a researcher, I am an outsider, a Yoruba-speaking person from

the Southwest, while the study population is in the Igbo-speaking territory of the South-East. However, I thought that because I am from the Southern Nigeria, I should be protected by the privilege of being Southern Nigerian. During the fieldwork, I was confronted by certain questions and gestures such as 'why is a Yoruba man interested in Igbo matters?', 'Yoruba people are also partners of the North', 'You people are willing to secede from Nigeria to form Oduduwa Republic, why not research on your Yoruba people?', and all sorts. Considering these questions, I recognized that many participants did not feel comfortable sharing information with me because of my Yoruba identity. I explained to them that my research was for academic purpose.

To help build rapport and trust with the respondents, I had a one-on-one discussion with a chief in the community who was convinced after discussing the purpose of my research with him. As a result, he recommended a fellow Igbo man to take me around the various areas. During the fieldwork, my research assistant, introduced me as 'a student from Norway, and thus helping me gain access to those that were initially unwilling to participate in the interviews.

3.8   Ethical Consideration

Every research respondent's consent was prioritized in accordance with the UiT and the NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) protocols. The consent of the respondents was obtained by using both written and oral means. Although written consent was provided before I arrived for fieldwork, I was still able to get the later recommended respondents' oral consent while I was there. However, I was able to explain the study's goals to the interviewees, so they weren't under any compulsion to take part. Even though none of the questions were unclear, respondents were given the option to skip any that they felt uncomfortable answering. I also availed the interview guide to any of the respondents that wish to read through it. The consent of the respondents was not limited to interviewing them, I also requested their consent to make an audio recording of their voice, and to write part of what they were saying in my field-notes. Most of the time, respondents who chose not to have their voices recorded, requested that the interview be documented in writing. To prevent loss and unauthorized entry, the written documents and recorded voices are both preserved.

The principle of anonymity was strictly adhered to throughout this research. Consequently, the names and addresses of my gatekeeper, informant, and respondents were not disclosed. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, as previously established, maintaining the confidentiality of

my respondents was essential to safeguard them from any potential harm and encourage open and honest discussions. To further protect the anonymity of my respondents, the local participants shared their concerns about the Nigerian government, believing that the research findings would be made public, and the thesis could serve as a suitable platform for them to voice their demands to their leaders.

3.9   Going to the Fieldwork the Second Time

Even though it will be further discussed below (in a section on the challenges of the study), it is important to note that one of the constraints of this research is the researcher's inability to meet up with all the potential respondents due to certain reasons. Therefore, I – the researcher, was of the view that the number of interviews I conducted in the first place is insufficient for the in-depth understanding the research tends to provide. Thus, the researcher had to travel back to Southeast Nigeria for the completion of the data collection exercise. There is a debate among qualitative researchers and methodologists on the sample size of qualitative research. According to Baker and Edwards, the question of how many qualitative interviews is enough for qualitative research always has the answer of 'it depends' on the context (Baker and Edward 2012). While Dworkin acknowledges that professionals in the field of qualitative research tend to sidestep the topic of "how many" interviews are necessary for a qualitative study, she recommends that between five and fifty participants, along with several articles, are sufficient (Dworkin 2012, p 1319).

As I did in my first time in the fieldwork, I was consistent with all the guiding research ethics which I have mentioned above. Thence, the consent of all the participants was requested before the interview. Also, it was a more comfortable environment on the second trip than the first stance, and I could interview as much as I wanted. Despite this, however, I was conscious of reaching the stage of saturation in considering the sample size for the study. Saturation, according to Mason (2010), is attained when gathering additional information which do not provide any new insight into the problem being investigated. Considering this, I granted not a very large volume of interviews.

By the time of my second visit, the anxiety that surrounded the Nigerian pre-election period had subsided. As a result, I was able to visit my participants in their respective places. Unlike my first trip, when the policy of the Naira Redesign in Nigeria affected money circulation both at hand and in banks, this was no so anymore. Consequently, I was able to conduct eleven (11)

interviews and hold one (1) FGD with my participants. Since I got to the study area after Nigeria's general election, I observed that participants were more willing to respond to my inquiries. The FDG was a group of six, all males. I was able to gather the group because my gatekeeper took me to the junction where the tricycle riders were gathered. I spoke to the man who was introduced to me as the 'Chairman' of their assemblage. The acclaimed Chairman therefore assisted me in addressing his fellow tricyclists and six of them gave me attention. There were no difficulties in getting them to know me and the goal of the study. I spent twenty to thirty minutes with each person in the one-on-one interviews, and about forty minutes in the FDG, while I followed all the ethical guidelines that I noted above.

3.10 Challenges and Limitations

While preparing to travel to Nigeria for data collection, I informed my gatekeeper of my coming, and I was able to reach some respondents via phone calls, and an agreement was reached on the likely date of the interviews. Knowing that my resident permit would be renewed three months before it expired and that I would be able to travel back and forth without any restrictions, I sent the notifications and finalized the plans three months earlier. Unfortunately, my application was delayed for five months at the immigration (UDI). This delay, however, imposed two major challenges on the research. Firstly, many of the respondents were unable to reschedule meetings with me after I failed to appear as planned with them. As a result, I began sourcing for new connections with respondents that have knowledge of the subject at hand. Secondly, I coincidentally got to Nigeria in the month of the national\general elections. Thus, one of the features of general elections in Nigeria is the security concern it creates across the country. Specifically in southeast Nigeria, it was in the public domain that the group under study had warned that the election was not going to be allowed in the study area. According to the *Nigerian Tribune*, a leading separatist agitator who lives in Finland had declared "sit-at-home orders across the South-East, insisting that there would be no election in the region…" (*Nigerian Tribune*, Feb 19, 2023). Consequently, despite the security of the area being beefed up to ensure human safety, many of the respondents were reluctant to meet me.

Another challenge was the scarcity of funds. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) created a Naira Redesign Policy prior to my presence in Nigeria, which meant that the old paper currency was no longer considered legal tender and should be replaced by the new currency. I arrived for fieldwork at a time when everyone had returned their old currency to the bank, and there

were not enough new notes available for use. Although the official justification for this policy was that Nigeria was moving toward becoming a cashless society, it had repercussions for everyday transactions that involved cash payments. Therefore, getting a taxi from the airport to the hotel, paying for lodging services, and getting to the study area, all became challenging for me. The problem was made worse by network connections, when funds were taken out of my account but never reached the intended receiver, or if it did, it may take three days or longer before payment confirmation was sent. This policy, however, hindered my mobility, and as a result, I couldn't reach some of the research participants while some advised we reschedule the interview for another time.

Even though I already have stated the security challenges caused by Nigeria's general election, it is important to take into consideration the security concerns regarding the study group. It is especially important to take additional precautions when conducting research on a conflict in which one of the conflicting parties is a separatist organization. As noted by Williams, for the researcher and the respondents to be secure should be strictly addressed during the field study (William 1992), therefore, given that the group under study had been accused of being violent, my primary concern during the fieldwork was for the safety of both me and my respondents. Sadly, many conflict researchers have been hurt during their fieldwork. Hence, during my time conducting fieldwork, I noticed that the group's members looked unwelcoming, the reason being the Nigerian government's continued detention of the group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, despite the court's ruling that he should be released. Although I wasn't swayed by the fear of being hurt, as that could affect my state of mind. Instead, I made it known to my respondents that the research is for academic purposes and that I meant no harm.

It should be acknowledged that going to the fieldwork for the second time was better than the first time. As I've noted earlier, all the pre-election concerns and unrest were not felt on the second trip. Even at this, the financial cost of flying to Nigeria and other expenses created another burden for me as a researcher. Due to the expenses, I, therefore, had to shorten the time I spent in Nigeria. By reducing the time, it affected my follow-up questions, I couldn't ask many questions from my participants, because I had already planned to meet at least three participants in a day. Also, after the conduct of the general elections in Nigeria, there were shreds of concerns over the outcomes of the election. The candidate from the presidential election who came from Igbo ethnic group, Peter Obi, was said to have been rigged out by the

declared (and yet to be sworn-in) winner of the election, Bola Tinubu. Coincidentally, the pronounced winner shares the same ethnic group as me, the researcher. However, while the election was challenged in the competent court of law, when I was conducting the second fieldwork, there were growing concerns as the supporters of Peter Obi and other Igbo youths and nationalists were warning that Bola Tinubu whom the electoral commission declared as the winner of the pull should not be sworn in as the President of Nigeria. Not only that, the Igbo people who voted in the Yoruba region of the southwest where I, the researcher come from, were also claimed to have been brutalized in Lagos State (Lagos state is one of the five Yoruba States of the Southwest). In effect, throughout my stay in the southeast, I was conscious of reprisal attacks on the Yoruba people who were in Igboland.

3.11 Summary

To answer the questions this thesis poses, qualitative data are gathered from three categories of participants, namely: members of the IPOB separatist organization, the Igbo ethnic minority in southeast Nigeria, and Nigerian security officials. While methods for data collection are unstructured interviews and Focused Group Discussion (FDG). Therefore, to supplement this kind of primary data, other written materials were utilized as sources. Nonetheless, many challenges were met while conducting the fieldwork, but the most severe of them was the Nigerian government's currency redesigning policy, which had an impact on the lack of funding and limited the researcher's mobility. As such, this policy made it difficult to contact many of my potential respondents. As a result, I made a second trip to the field to mitigate the impacts of the first trip.

The Nigeria-IPOB conflict may not be understood effectively without considering Nigeria's only civil war. The Biafra war is believed to be the origin of the current IPOB activities in the Igbo territory of Southeast Nigeria. In the next chapter, the historical development of secession in Nigeria before and during the civil war (1967–1970) is covered. I also draw attention to the many post-war peacebuilding initiatives, and how their failure prompted the IPOB activities of late.

4 Historical Background to the Conflict

The current separatist agitation led by the IPOB is argued to have taken its sources from the events of the Nigerian civil war. However, many historians have also narrated that advocacy for Igbo ethnic group's separation from Nigeria had started when Britain amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates, and the Lagos colony, in 1914. In this section, I present the historical background of the Nigeria civil war, widely known as the Biafra War (July 1967 to January 1970) and how the war has become the symbol of division in Nigeria. Also, I resonate on strengths and weaknesses of various peacebuilding schemes that were put in place after the war.

4.1 Evolution of Secession in Nigeria

For a better understanding of how separatist demands evolve in Nigeria, I take into consideration of how the aspirations of secession began under the colonial rule till date. The momentum for separation is reported to have been building in Nigeria under the control of the European colonial power, the British, even before the separatist inclination eventually turned into a civil war. This part of the study narrates how this demand gravitates from colonial to post-colonial eras and why such shift is made possible.

4.1.1 Separatist Demands in Nigeria Under the Colonial Rule

The history of separatist agitations in Nigeria has been affected by the 'politics of memory'. According to Onuoha, this 'politics of memory' demonstrates how frequently information has been uncertain, disputed, challenged, forgotten, hidden, invented, modified, or remade (Onuoha 2013). In other words, both the Nigerian government and different ethnic minorities have given varied accounts of past activities to justify their actions. Nevertheless, what is known as Nigeria today is a unified territory that was created in 1914, through the amalgamation of Britain's colonial possessions. As a manifestation of the British colonial hegemony, numerous self-governing groups merged to promote the creation of a stable social and economic order (Dorward 1986). After the annexation of different groups to form the Northern and Southern protectorates, it is said that both divides were not in agreement with the union. Thus, some historians contend that secessionist threats or separatist agitations in Nigeria date back to as far as 1914, during Lugard's amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates. According to Ezera Kalu, "the administrations – Northern and Southern- were

antagonistic to each other. They had, in fact, carried their 'separateness' even to the point of building competing railway systems" (Kalu 1960, pp 16). As such, the Northerners were unwilling to be united with the Southerners, they thought the amalgamation was an error. In fact, "…differences in land policy persisted; while the technical services such as agriculture, education, police, and prisons remained separate until the 1920s" (Dorward 1986, pp 415). It is also observed that both the North and South were of different backgrounds; while the North was an Islamic-based and Arabic-oriented area, the South was more Christianized and tailored to Western education (Dorward 1986). In effect, it is said that the Northern province, which makes up most of the population, enjoyed preferential treatment even though the British colonial plan advocated united and equal treatment to Nigerian groups prior to the arrangement. This uneven treatment, however, is thought to be done for the purpose of persuading the Northern province to embrace unity. Consequently, the escalating nationalist sentiments in Nigeria following the amalgamation exacerbates the ethnic rivalries that followed independence. According to Nafziger and Richter (1976), ethnic nationalism intensifies when some groups become aware of their exclusion from the benefits of modernization and self-government.

Indeed, it is essential to note that separatist agitations in Nigeria did not start with the Nigeria Civil War of 1967, as it is usually misconstrued. According to Tamunu (1970), the leader of Northern Nigeria, Sir Amadu Bello alluded in his autobiography that, "Lord Lugard and his Amalgamation were far from popular amongst us at that time. There were agitations in favour of secession; we should set upon our own; we should cease to have anything more to do with the Southern people" (pp 565). It seems then, that the Northern province is where the desire for secession originated. Going further, therefore, the threats by some of Nigeria's ethnic nationalities to go their separate ways have been a recurring feature of Nigeria's political history. Sometimes, separatist threats have been employed by political leaders of the various ethnic groups as a tool of political negotiation, meant to extract favourable concessions from other ethnic groups (ibid). For example, the series of negotiations that took place amongst representatives of various ethnic groups during the constitutional conferences organized by the British Colonial Office in London, in August 1953, was almost aborted by separatist tendencies exhibited by most of the delegations. Also, it is thought that when the 1954 Lagos Constitutional Conference began, the Action Group (AG), the political party led by Obafemi Awolowo, was dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group of the Western Region. Action Group

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fiercely advocated for a constitutional clause granting any of the federating regions the right to secede from the federation. However, this notion was said to have been opposed by the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC). The NCNC was the political party headed by Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo man from the East, who later became the first Nigerian President. At its conclusion, the Conference decided against including a secession provision in the revised constitutions.

4.2 The Nigerian Civil War/ The Biafra War (1967-1970)

The event of the Nigerian civil war which is claimed to be the foundation of recent times' conflict between the Nigerian state and the Igbo ethnic division, could be better discussed in different segments. Here, I discuss the event prior to, during, and the events after, particularly, the peacebuilding schemes that follows the war.

4.2.1 Pre-war Event

The Nigerian civil war that started in 1967 is traced back to the first military coup of January 1966. The 1966 military coup d'état was nicknamed the 'Igbo Coup', because the leading plotters of the coup were majorly from the Igbo ethnic group from the Eastern part of Nigeria. The coup which abrupted Nigeria's first republic cost the lives of foremost northern political leaders including Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of the Northern region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and four senior Northern military officers and the Premier of the Western region also became the victims of the coup. Therefore, after the coup, according to Casey, the plotters of the coup were arrested after which no prosecution was carried out by Gen. Ironsi, who also, is another Igbo man (Casey 2008, cited in Maiangwa 2016). It is said that military officers from the North were not comfortable with the development. They had concluded that the coup which wiped away the top political figures in the North was sectional, and perversive because it spared the President, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and the Premier of Eastern region, Michael Okpara (both from Eastern Nigeria). And it became clearer as Gen. Ironsi did not punish the perpetrators. Hence, the reason for a countercoup in July 1966 by predominantly Northern military officers that led to the death of Gen. Ironsi, and the killings of the Easterners (Igbo civilians) that were residing in the North.

As conceived by Tamuno (1970), Ojukwu, who later led the secessionist Igbo army in the civil war against the Nigerian state in 1967, had initially expressed his dedication to a united Nigeria.

Ojukwu admitted that countries like China, the U.S.S.R., and the U.S.A. served as inspirations due to their successful utilization of their large, diverse populations for nation building (pp 580). However, the events of the July 1966 countercoup and the treatment of Easterners in the North are considered to have changed Ojukwu's mindset. Consequently, under the leadership of Lt. Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Eastern region launched a significant effort to secede from Nigeria in 1967, causing widespread consternation throughout the entire federation.

4.2.2   During The Biafra War

Atrocities committed against Igbo and other Easterners residing in the "*Sabongari*"[9] of the Northern Nigerian towns, reached a peak between June and October 1966 after several violent outbursts. Tens of thousands of people died because of the violence, which the Nigerian government did nothing to stop. According to Johannes Harnischfeger, between 5,000 to 10,000 Igbo traders and other civil servants/administrators were killed prior to the Biafra War (ibid). Following several failed talks, however, the then-Governor of the Eastern Region, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, proclaimed the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 (Bello 2022). The country was given the name of the Bight of Biafra, a bay on the Atlantic Coast of Nigeria. The Nigeria-Biafra War started on July 6th. According to Tamuno (1970), both Ojukwu, who led the separatist side of Biafra, and Lt. Col. Gowon, who became the Nigerian military head of state during the period of war, "occasionally made conflicting or misleading statements on the basis of Nigerian unity" (pp 578). Both leading figures of the war however compromised the foundation of Nigeria's unity. It is fair to say that each of these leaders had his own ethnic group in mind rather than Nigeria as a whole.

Indeed, the war was asymmetrically fought, that is, the Nigerian army was much larger and better equipped because it was said to have been backed by British and Soviet military aid. The Nigerian army had a significant advantage in terms of firepower, logistics, and training, which allowed them to launch massive offensives against the secessionist Biafra army. The Biafra army, therefore, had to rely on Swedish mercenaries, using guerrilla tactics and hit-and-run attacks to sustain its resistance against the Nigerian forces. Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, and Gabon were the countries that recognized the Biafran Republic. By 1968, however, the Biafra territory had lost all its seaports and had become completely landlocked, requiring

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[9] Sabongeri literally means the 'foreigner's section' in Northern Nigeria's Hausa language.

helicopter transport for all imports. Starvation and disease followed; estimates of wartime mortality vary between 500,000 and 3,000,000 (Britannica, 2023). The situation led to severe malnutrition, which affected a significant number of Igbo people, most specifically, pictures of starving children with huge bellies were shown all over the world. A significant number of pieces of literature tagged the event as "massacre" and "genocide". Consequently, the war ended with the defeat of the Biafran army, they surrendered eventually, and the reintegration of the secessionist state back into Nigeria started. Nevertheless, Nigeria suffered long-lasting effects from the conflict, including widened ethnic and political divisions that continue today. Images of starving Igbo children became a universal representation of the suffering brought on by war, which had a major effect on how the world saw humanitarian crises.

4.2.3 Post-war Event

The Biafra war ended with the cliché of "No victor, no vanquished," intending to encourage reconciliation for the benefit of reintegration. However, the Nigerian state was never the same again. The events between 1967-1970 left numerous legacies: distrust, division, state repression, and the belief that secession is not impossible. This period also established patterns of crime and a reputation for corruption. As Samuel Daly notes, "the Nigerian Civil War would be the spark that started a long blaze" (Daly 2020, pp 5). Indeed, the memory of the war allowed the Igbos to "debate their place in, loyalty to, and viability of the Nigerian state" (Maiangwa 2016, pp 50). Nevertheless, the following were part of the peacebuilding mechanisms put in place to solidify the ambition of Nigerian national integration:

4.3 The Peacebuilding Schemes Implemented After the Biafra War

According to Findley (2013), it is a common practice that after the end of a civil war, what comes thereafter is to bring heads together and build peace. The Nigerian government had envisaged the aftermath and likely hardest consequences of the war; hence some peacebuilding moves after the end of the war. It became urgent to reintegrate all national minorities who might be harbouring identical intentions, not just the Igbo ethnic minority who demonstrated their willingness to secede. Therefore, there were schemes put in place after the civil war to redesign the unity of Nigeria, and majorly to reconcile the seceding Igbo ethnic group.

4.3.1 The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The National Youth Service Corps was initiated in 1973, three years after the end of the civil war, to promote unity among the youths of Nigeria. The program entails sending the graduates of tertiary institutions to different parts of the country for a year service period. This scheme was introduced by the military government of Gen. Yakubu Gowon who was Nigeria's head of state during the civil war. However, the scheme was criticized on the ground that some people induced the NYSC officials to place them in the states of their choice (ibid). Thus, the effectiveness of the scheme remained questionable since Nigerian youths, through the corrupt NYSC officials, could avoid some of the states and even consider the states within their own ethnic group. In lieu of this, the purpose for the creation of the NYSC scheme was partly defeated since it was designed to promote inter-ethnic understanding and foster a sense of national identity among Nigerian youth.

4.3.2 The Policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction (RRR)

As Robert Muggah argued, the "common perception among donors and policymakers is that when armed conflicts come to an end, safety, and security are likely to 'return' (Muggah 2005, pp 240). Considering this, after the Biafra war, the policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction was implemented by the federal government of Nigeria to achieve certain goals that revolve around peacebuilding in Nigeria. The motive behind this policy was for peace to be returned to the polity. As such, the policy aims to rebuild the war-torn regions and reintegrate the people affected by the war to get back into society. The policy included, among other things, giving monetary and material support to the people and communities impacted by the conflict and making investments in the development of infrastructure in Nigeria's eastern region. This policy, therefore, also targeted influencing the government's slogan of "no victor, no vanquished". As part of the rehabilitation process, according to Falode and Bolarinwa (2019), four existing state colleges were taken over by the federal military government, and six new federal universities were founded in April 1975. In the then-12 States of the Federation, Gen. Gowon also founded Federal Government Colleges and named them "Unity Schools".

4.3.3 The National Integration Program

The National Integration Program (NIP) was initiated in 1975 to promote national integration and unity. The core intention of the program was to promote understanding and respect among different ethnic and religious groups and also to create a sense of common purpose and identity.

There were many activities that the National Integration Program was involved in, such as sports competitions, educational programs, and cultural festivals across Nigeria. Hence, all programs, however, were initiated to foster inter-ethnic relationships. Therefore, despite all the national integration programs, Bello-Imam contended that there was still 'prevalent discrimination' and that the Nigerian people had a 'feeling of insecurity' in another man's state, therefore, the "national integration becomes a mere dream" (Bello-Imam 1987, pp272). It is important to note that many peacebuilding initiatives that were put in place by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria (FMGN) were judged to be short and ineffective. Moreover, many writers have suggested that, for example, the creation of additional 12 states by the Gen. Gowon-led military government were to disintegrate the Eastern region, so that the regional government would be weak, and more powers would be concentrated at the federal\ centre. Gen. Gowon was also judged to have failed to successfully address the nation-building issues because he was dressed as a reformer and a guardian when a rebuilder and a reconstructor were required. (Falode and Bolarinwa 2019). Nevertheless, it is essential to note that the difficulties in Nigeria's national integration and other ethnic-based conflicts are thought to be a result of the failure of successful peacebuilding procedures after the civil war.

4.4   Separatist Demand in Nigeria Under the Military Rule

Nigerian democracy was truncated by military men a couple of times[10]. As presented by Larry Diamond, the role of the military in Nigerian democracy was initially proposed to be fixed, "after which its future existence would be put to the people in a national referendum, and continued until they voted to end it" (Diamond 1984, pp 919). Unfortunately, however, military incursion in Nigerian democracy happens without the go-ahead of the civilians. They come through coups and leave whenever they wish. Consequently, all forms of rebellion and separatist agitations by ethnic groups were outlawed due to the military's anti-human rights and anti-democratic inclinations. It is in accordance to say that what could be viewed as the first secession in Nigeria under a military regime, surfaced and was short-lived within twelve days in 1967. This strive, however, was spearheaded by Isaac Adaka Boro who was captured within those twelve days, tried for treason, and sent to prison. As noted by Osaghae (1995), the actions

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[10] Nigeria's democracy has been truncated on several occasions by the military juntas through coup d'état: January 15, 1966-October 1979, December 31, 1983-August 27, 1993; and November 17, 1993-May 28, 1999)

of Adaka Boro and his associates "had a tint of separatist agitation in the assertion of the right to 'national' self-determination" (pp 326).

In what follows, the 1990 Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MASOP) also presents advocacies that made demands for self-determination under a military government. However, the leadership of the MASOP and other groups within Ogoni handed over the 'Ogoni Bill of Rights' to the leadership of the Nigerian military regime. It is crucial to note that the MASOP wanted to control the economic resources in the Ogoni territory and be a part of the governing structure of the Nigerian state, and they expressed this desire in their Bill of Rights. According to Osaghae(1995), the then President of MASOP, Garrick Leton, averred that "If the land is ours, irrespective of the law put in place by the major ethnic groups, anything that comes out of the land should be ours", and if the military government is not showing the willingness to grant the right, a leader of MASOP, Ken Saro-Wiwa concluded that the military "will have to shoot and kill every Ogoni man, woman and child to take more of their oil (Osaghae 1995, pp 327). In fact, Ken Saro Wiwa was a prominent leader and front-runner of a self-determination organization of the Ogoni ethnic group called MASOP. He engaged in many non-violent campaigns in the 1990s. According to Ben Naanen (1994), the Nigerian government was concerned that, if left uncontrolled, "the Ogoni revolution" could spread to other oil-rich regions and undermine the state's economic foundation. To Shell-BP, which was the major oil company operating in the Eastern part of Nigeria, giving in to Ogoni's requests would be tantamount to opening a Pandora's Box, unleashing a wave of similar demands from the company's other operating regions in Nigeria (p538). Therefore, Saro-Wiwa was prosecuted by the military regime of General Sani Abacha and was later hanged to death in 1995. Again, another occasion when a united Nigeria was threatened was in 1993. Separatist threats emerged following the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, which was ostensibly won by Yoruba politician M.K.O Abiola. On June 23, 1993, Nigeria's self-declared military president, Ibrahim Babangida, annulled the results of the election, setting off demonstrations and civil unrest, primarily in the southwest of the country. In general, it could be argued that separatist agitations always dramatically decreased when the Nigerian military interrupted the country's democratic process.

4.5   Separatist Demands in Nigeria's Contemporary Democracy: 1999 to Date

Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after a long military rule. The resurgence of democracy in Nigeria indicates that all democratic values—including the rule of law, respect for basic human rights, freedom to protest, lawfully challenge any unfavorable government policy, agitation for self-determination, and even secession—should reappear. In light of the latest development, the Nigerian state was confronted with various demands from organizations that claimed to be representing the ethnic minorities in Nigeria: The Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in the Southwest and the MASSOB in the Southeast. The OPC reinvites the memory of the annulled Abiola's election in 1993. Consequently, the democratic government of former Nigeria's President, Obasanjo, clamped on similar Southwest separatist agitators. On the account of Gani Adams, the OPC leader in Southwest Nigeria, "in 2001, I was detailed for another three and a half months, so it affected a lot of things. But the 14th-month detention [in 2000] affected everything I had. So, I had to start to rebuild everything I had in my life." (Premium News, 2020). Also, as contained in a document released by Human Right Watch, Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 came with zero tolerance for self-determination and or separatist organizations in both the southeast and southwest. In effect, other self-determination groups in Nigeria, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which was active in the southeast, have saw a similar pattern of police repression (Human Right Watch, 2003).

As argued by Omilusi (2020), the "history of Nigeria has been littered with the rise and fall of ethnoreligious groups, there has been a dramatic upsurge in the number of the so-called *self-determination* ethnic militia groups since 1999 when the country re-democratized" (Omilusi et al, 2020). In other words, a plethora of separatist groups and social movements, with diverse aims and targets, exists in the six geopolitical zones of the country. The division of the country into six geopolitical zones[11] seems to have aggravated the proliferation of separatist groups since it has made ethnic mobilization a bit easier for the specific ethnic groups occupying the different geopolitical zones (Alumona and Peel, 2009). At that, several groups have come up with different demands, but only a few of these groups have challenged the Nigerian government to demand secession. For instance, the Niger-Delta region's various movements,

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[11] The division of Nigeria into six geo-political zones is not constitutionally recognized but has become a platform for political accommodation by the government. The zones are Southwest, Southeast, Southsouth, Northwest, Northcentral, and Northeast.

including the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Ijaw National Council (INC), the Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN), and the Egbesu Youths, have also threatened to secede if they were not given the opportunity to control the resources in their regions or receive a greater portion of the oil revenue. Also, the Arewa People Congress (APC), which represents the North, has not advocated for a separate existence with the same intensity as the other organizations. However, this could be the only reason for this is that for most of Nigeria's history, the North has held the reins of political authority. Without a doubt, Nigeria's state has been mostly governed by the North. As a result of controlling governmental power and all the wealth that flows from it, it has benefited more from the Nigeria project than any other ethnic group.

In 2015, a Yoruba leader and former presidential candidate, Olu Falae, was kidnapped on his 77th birthday at his Akure residence. The kidnappers, claimed to be Fulani herdsmen from the Northern region, had "contacted Chief Olu Falae's wife and demanded the sum of N100 million before they would release him" (The Guardian, 2015). This incident intensified demands for checks on Fulani herdsmen in the southwest region's farming communities. Moreover, notable Yoruba leaders made a separatist threat after an emergency session in Ibadan. They asserted that the Yoruba people would assert their standing in the Nigerian federation. According to these Yoruba ethnic elders, they felt compelled to seek regional autonomy for the Yoruba region because Nigeria's federal system could no longer ensure their safety and that of their possessions (BBC News Africa, 2017). Overall, while many ethnic-based organisations have resigned or ceased to exist since 1999, IPOB stands out as the most enduring group in recent history.

4.6   Summary of the Historical Background of the Nigeria-Biafra Conflict

This section of the study provided the historical background of how separatist agitations have developed in Nigeria from the colonial era to the present day. Since the British amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 to form the entity called Nigeria, the country has been marked by a 'marriage of inconvenience'. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafra War, brought separatist demands in Nigeria to the world's attention. Subsequently, the events following the end of the civil war not only exposed the ineffectiveness of the peacebuilding process but also highlighted the unanswered question of peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's ethnic groups.

In the next chapter, I attempt to remove the ambiguities of some basic concepts. Self-determination and secession are the main concepts in this study, however, despite that IPOB leaders and sympathisers have been observed employing the two words interchangeably to express their objectives. There is terminological ambiguity around the two concepts. The normative right of a group to propose secession is then explained in the second part of the chapter. I therefore used both primary right and remedial right theories to support whether an ethnically based organisation like IPOB, or its wider Igbo ethnic population, have such a right to pursue secession.

5 Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This section presents the conceptual clarifications of the major terms used in this study. More often, self-determination is used in place of secession, and vice versa. However, the concept of self-determination may have two meanings, while secession is explained in the simplest form in such a way that it cannot be used synonymously with self-determination. Then, the concept of 'indigenous people' as it appears in the acronyms of the IPOB separatist organization is reflected upon.

5.1   Self-determination as a Concept

The idea of Self-determination is a key topic that reads different meanings to different people, although it is a term that is prominent in the discourse of global politics, post-colonialism, and human rights. According to Jewkes (2014), "self-determination is the rarest of things in political discourse: a concept that enjoys almost universal assent" (pp 147). However, it might be said that self-determination features commonly in discourse that is related to indigenous peoples and other minorities. For this study, self-determination is discussed to imply the contexts of both indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. It should be emphasized that when the conversation shifts from an international to a domestic or local level, the idea of self-determination becomes problematic. it is argued that Indigenous peoples usually present their struggle for recognition on a global scale once their natural rights are violated using the tools of the international system, such as the United Nations (Minde 2008). Also, self-determination demands often surface on a local level when there is a question that hinges on the management of human and natural resources in a multinational state (Cornells 2015). To put it explicitly, self-determination at the local level is not all about power sharing in a nation-state. As conceded by Henry Minde, "it would be naïve to think that self-determination is just about governance principles. In real situations, it is also about wealth and power…" (Minde 2008, p14). Moreover, another way to think of self-determination is in terms of two notions: the philosophical notion and the legal notion.

5.1.1 Self-determination from the philosophical notion

The philosophical notion of self-determination projects the idea of fairness in the relationship between the states and their minorities. This notion holds that "humans – both as individuals and as peoples – have the equal right to freely control their destiny" (Minde 2008, 13). This normative view of self-determination comes into demand when a group admits that what is bequeathed on them, that is, lands and other natural belongings, are taken from them or they are partially allowed to use them (Stilz 2015). According to Preda (2002), Self-determination demands arise when smaller groups commonly claim that they are politically subordinated in a way that undermines their sense of belonging in a multinational state where many groups create a 'supposed' autonomy of their own. Hence, nationalist groups, indigenous movements, and individual activists mostly advocate that even though they are not seen as a significant part of the nation-state, they should be able to preserve their natural heritage. Essentially, Self-determination from a philosophical notion, as contended by Kelman et al (1987), is a liberal principle that all citizens should have equality of opportunity, that is, equal access to opportunities, including the political system, educational opportunities, and markets (Kelman et al 1987, in Minde 2008). It might be argued that this philosophical idea of self-determination entails the desire for acknowledgement of a minority group's right to have control over what nature bestows upon them without demanding separation from their state.

5.1.2 Self-determination from the legal notion

The legal notion emerged when self-determination changed from being a privilege of affiliation to becoming a right. Preda et al (2003) contended that the legal notion of self-determination is popularized by the continuous demands of numerous indigenous peoples' movements through the internationalization of national minorities' struggle for recognition. It is argued that the political suppression of minorities in multinational states is an advanced form of colonialization (Dirlik 2002). Therefore, the notion of self-determination from the legal point of view is a product of decolonization. According to Benedict Kingsbury, 'In the early years of the international indigenous movement, a law enacted for the decolonization of former colonies of European states served as the movement's primary legal reference.' (Kingsbury 2005, pp22). Thus, in this form of self-determination, an international system like the UN entertains and listens to some agitations of the indigenous peoples who claims they are oppressed by their mother states.

Since self-determination of peoples has become a human right, sections 1, 2, and 3 of Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Theses articles dictate that, "indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they traditionally owned (…), the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess (…), states shall give legal recognition and protections of these lands, territories and resources." (Minde 2008, pp 11). Unlike the philosophical notion of self-determination where minorities demand to maintain their natural heritage from the state in a relatively friendly manner, Stephen Allen argued that the legal project of self-determination sees the state as the 'bad' one, where the 'international law' is the 'good' one, where the states "needs to be prompted and pushed into doing the right thing" (Stephen 2011, pp 226).

5.2   Secession as a concept

Making the distinction between secession and self-determination has grown to be an arduous effort (Belkovich 2015). Most of the literature, however, views an ethnic minority's decision to secede from a sovereign state as an act of self-determination (Goumenos 2006). The concept of self-determination is one of those that are susceptible to misunderstanding in discussions of democracy and the interactions between a state and its minorities. As argue by Micheal Jewkes, "one thing that political actors and philosophers have found widespread agreement upon, however, is that self-determination need not, and often should not, be interpreted to mean secession and the establishment of a newly independent state" (Jewkes 2014, pp 142). Nonetheless, the ambiguity is still not removed if the dichotomy between self-determination and secession is not discussed.

According to Driest (2015), secession or separatism does not necessarily imply a group demanding self-determination or their rights to it. In simple terms, secession is not synonymous with self-determination. As pointed out by David Miller, it is crucial to "avoid the error of thinking that the principle of national self-determination requires every cultural group to have its own state" (Miller 1995, pp. 113, cited in Jewkes, 2014). Although Rainer (2019) sees secession as a politically upgraded version of self-determination, Muñoz and Tormos (2015) define secession as the demand for separate statehood from an established one. To clarify, secession implies a complete dissociation from a host state to form an independent state. There is a consensus, as submitted by Nielson (1993), that ethnic minorities often demand secession

when they are dissatisfied with the federalism model chosen by the state to address their ethnic and cultural differences.

5.3   Secession as a Human Right

As mentioned earlier, the right to self-determination for indigenous peoples is stated in the articles of the UN, and similarly, the AU, an intercontinental organization for African countries, explicitly recognizes this right. However, the right to secession remains ambiguous. Although the right to self-determination is often used interchangeably with the right to secession, ethnic nationalists base their secession demands on sections supporting the right to self-determination. Current studies in liberalism show that arguments about individual 'rights' and 'freedoms' can be extended to groups of individuals, allowing them to associate and dissociate freely. According to Kai Nielson, secession should be viewed as a right "based on the individual right to autonomy valued by liberalism" (Saideman 2000, pp. 515). In Harry Beran's argument, "liberalism assumes that normal adults are self-governing choosers(...) they have the capacity to reconsider their beliefs and goals based on reasons... and act on them to influence their world. Such individuals are responsible for their decisions regarding their selves [in choosing to remain or separate from a state]" (Beran 1984, pp. 24). However, achieving the right to secession has become exceedingly difficult, even in the most advanced liberal democracies. As obtaining a clear right to secession seems challenging, Nielson (1998) suggested considering 'weaker forms of self-determination short of statehood' as an alternative (Nielson 1998, cited in Jewkes 2014, pp. 147).

5.4   Summary of the Conceptual Framework

Some fundamental conceptual ambiguities have been addressed related to secession and self-determination in this section. Because both ideas refer to a sense of autonomy for a people, secession is frequently used in place of self-determination. Both philosophical and legal notions are used to describe self-determination, which is the right of minorities in a nation-state to control their own natural inheritance and have a share in the government. On the other hand, secession denotes a people's preparedness to break away from the mother state and establish a new one.

5.5   Background to the Theoretical Framework

Most studies which are related to separatist agitations have adopted many theories to know why do people demand self-determination up to secession? Researchers used theories like the Greed and Grievance Theory by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2000), which contends that the availability of natural resources like oil, gold, and others could lead to conflict between ethnic minority and the state. Also, the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis by John Dullard et al., asserts that when individuals or groups are frustrated, there is likelihood of aggression that could lead to violence. Here, I adopted two significant theories to discuss the rights of the people to demand self-determination up to secession because I want to assess whether or not minority groups and organizations reserve the right to demand secession. First, the Primary Right Theory by Allan Buchanan (1997), and the second one is the Remedial Right Theory by Michael Seymour (2007) are the two theories this study considered for this purpose.

5.5.1   The Primary Right Theory

The Primary Right Theory was propounded in 1997 by Allan Buchanan in his publication titled, 'The Theories of Secession'. His theory has been cited by several scholars because the proposal of the theory was written earlier in 1992 after what he called a long time of 'philosophical neglect' of secession, in his book titled, 'Self-determination and Right to Secede'. The theory critiqued 'liberalism' and 'international organization' such as the United Nations (UN) for the violence that takes over every corner of the world due to secession. According to Allan Buchanan, "Within the Western philosophical tradition, one finds neither a theory of the right to secede nor an explanation of why no such theory is needed" (Buchanan 1992: 348). The primary right theory, therefore, contended that, 'the state of international law on secession is far from satisfactory. On the one hand, various international bodies, including the United Nations (UN), periodically proclaim a broad 'right of self-determination of all peoples', which seems to imply a right to secede, but these bodies then vainly attempt to restrict the scope of this right, quite arbitrarily, to cases of peoples struggling to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism' (Buchanan 1992: 348).

5.5.2   Justifications for The Primary Right Theory

There are two justifications for the Primary Right Theory, correspondingly, however, they both fit the intention of this study. First, the IPOB's claim that the Igbo ethnic group are the original inhabitants of the southeast Nigeria before Nigeria's independence, this corresponds with one

of the two essential justifications for the Primary Right Theory, which Buchanan noted as the 'Rectificatory Justice'. The right to secede under 'Rectificatory Justice' happens "in situations in which the people attempting to secede are literally the same people who held legitimate title to the territory at the time of its unjust annexation, or at least are the indisputable descendants of those people" (Buchanan 1992: 353). Therefore, this theory supports an ethnic group who are the rightful occupants of a territory before the colonial construction of such a state to demand secession if the need arises.

The second justification for Primary Right Theory is the notion of 'Discriminatory Distribution'. However, this notion denotes that when there is a lopsided distribution of the general belonging of the state, by which a group or a few groups within the state benefit, while one or other are denied such benefits. According to Allan Buchanan, every time a state enacts regulations, or economic initiatives that consistently hurt some groups while helping others in morally unjustifiable ways, it is engaging in discriminatory redistribution. In the IPOB-Nigeria conflict, one of the fundamental claims is that the Igbo ethnic group is discriminated against geopolitical sharing[12]. Another example where the right to secede could be demanded is when a particular ethnic group generates more revenue for the state than what they get in return, while another area and its people generate less get more. It is argued that when the copper producing Katanga demanded independence from Congo, the group contributed about half of the total revenue of the state while getting only 20 percent in return.

5.5.3   The Versions of the Primary Right Theory

According to Allan Buchanan, there are two versions of the Primary Right Theory: the 'Ascriptive Version', and the 'Associative Version'. The Ascriptive Version of the primary right to secession denotes that when members of a group share some distinctive features which are non-political, they reserve the right to secede from others who are different from them. As argued by Davis and Kalu-Uwiwu (2001), the distinctions between the major ethnic groups in Nigeria such as Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, are not hidden. To be clear, Igbo ethnic group could be easily distinguished from other ethnic groups in Nigeria due to their language, traditional mode of dressing and culture. According to Allan Buchanan, "ascriptive characteristics exist

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[12]   One of the thesis' participants claimed, in Chapter Six, that the Nigerian government allocated 6 states/provinces to each of the 6 geopolitical zones in Nigeria, only the Igbo's Southeast zone has 5 states. According to the participant, this is a discriminatory attempt by the Nigerian state against the Igbos.

independently of any actual political association that the members of the group may have forged (…) being a nation or people is an ascriptive characteristic. What makes a group a nation or people is the fact that it has a common culture, history, language, a sense of its own distinctiveness, and perhaps a shared aspiration for constituting its own political unit" (Buchanan 1997: 38). In other words, if a group's members share a culture and character that touch on many important aspects of life, rather than acquiring, as in case of the Igbo ethnic group, what drives them is self-identification, such a group may have its own state.

The Associative Version of the Primary Right to secede, therefore, alludes that sharing the same culture and other self-identification characteristics is not necessary before a group could demand a separate state. As such, the associative version "Any group, no matter how heterogeneous, can qualify for the right to secede (…) all that matters is that the members of the group voluntarily choose to associate together in an independent political unit of their own" (Buchanan 1997: 39). It is therefore assumed that the majority of Igbo people support the separatist demands of the IPOB, which is in line with the associative version of the Primary Right Theory. This version, however, stated that any organisation within a particular region of the state that can muster a 'substantial majority' in support of their demands fits to the right to secede.

5.5.4 The Remedial Right Theory

Michael Seymour's Remedial Right Theory propounded in 2007 is grounded in Allan Buchanan's theory (discussed above). It is crucial to note that Seymour offered the theory to make a philosophical assessment, criticize, and improve on Buchanan's primary right theory. Therefore, the remedial right theory contends that every cultural group has the right to secede but there should be significant reasons to justify their secession demand beyond the self-identification that Buchanan emphasized. Seymour's remedial right theory, thus, states that "all cultural groups could legitimately secede if (i) there were a special right to do so, that is, some kind of privilege, similar to a special provision occurring in a particular contract. In this case, the contract would be a constitution (…) (ii) we had to rectify some past injustice." (Seymour 2007, 397).

As against the claims of the Primary Right Theory, the Remedial Right Theory posits that international law should not guarantee all ethnic groups to proceed to secession, but only in special cases of multilateral agreement between parties (the state and the willing minority) or

if there are constitutional provisions. Although there are certain uncommon cases where multilateral consent to secession occurs, such as Norway's independence from Sweden in 1905, it might also be argued that the 1995 inclusion of secession in Ethiopia's constitution implies a constitutional agreement. Additionally, Ward (2017) argued that there should be requirements that must be met before secession is permitted, either by the state's approval through the state constitution or by the highest percentage of the minority agreeing to secede voluntarily in light of the injustice by the host state. In light of the aforementioned, it is conceivable to rely on the remedial right to secede in the case of the IPOB's demand for Igbo statehood, because the group claims that the Igbo ethnic group was wronged following the amalgamation of the Nigeria's Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914 (Olusegun, 2020), as well as other injustices committed by the Nigerian government against the Igbo people (Nsoedo, 2019).

In what follows, Harry Beran argued that liberal philosophers support the unity of the state, which he called the 'liberal democratic community', but this unity, however, should not be forced. According to Beran, "…by force a collection of persons [to becoming a member of a state] may be coerced or cowed into obedience; by force they may be frightening into seeking a community [a separate state] for protection…force cannot be the principle of unity. That unity must be founded on consent" (Beran 1984: 25). Therefore, given what the remedial right asserts, not that liberalism opposes secession as the theory of primary right postulates.

5.5.5   Relevant of the Theories to the Study

The arguments presented by both the Primary Right and Remedial Right Theories are pivotal to IPOB's activities, as they define the intricate dynamics of the relationship between the state and its agitating ethnic minority. These theories also offer insights into potential outcomes if the relationship between the ethnic minority and the mother state becomes strained and the issues of secession or self-determination are left unaddressed. While the right of ethnically based organizations to secede or seek self-determination has become a significant source of legal confusion in Nigeria and the broader international system, these two theories provide a philosophical framework. It is often argued that states tend to prioritize individual citizens' rights over considering their rights as a group to establish a 'liberal democratic community' (Beran 1984: 25). In Nigeria's context, these theories support the notion that the group's rights, such as IPOB's right to demand the Igbo ethnic group's separation or self-determination, should also be protected.

5.5.6   Summary of the Theoretical Framework

Given the global significance of self-determination and secession, numerous theories could be employed to contextualize the IPOB-Nigeria separatist conflict. However, this study adopts two normative theories that elucidate the rights of minority groups regarding self-determination and secession demands. Allan Buchanan's Primary Right Theory (1997) asserts that a group of people who are physically and culturally distinct from other groups within a state have the right to request a separate state if they so desire. In contrast, Seymour's (2007) Remedial Right Theory contends that being physically and culturally distinctive within a state should not be the sole requirement for demanding a separate state; additional justifications should be considered before making secession demands.

After applying the two theories of secession and gathering other valuable qualitative data, presentation of findings and discussions around the theories and data is the focus of the following chapter. In the same part, I give a general conclusion that include a summary of the study and indicate how my findings agreed or disagreed with the body of knowledge currently available regarding the Nigeria-IPOB conflict. In the last section of the following chapter, I go over the study's limitations and make recommendations for further studies on the Nigeria-IPOB conflict.

6 Analysis of Data

This chapter's objectives are to present an in-depth understanding of the data obtained from the fieldwork and to discuss the relevant themes drawn from the data. In the previous chapter, I presented and discussed the various factors influencing separatist activities of the IPOB in Southeast Nigeria, all of which were examined to assess the core factors prolonging the ongoing Nigeria-Igbo conflict. Additionally, the presentation and analysis of the data will be based on the main research questions, which are:

1. What are the core factors responsible for the separatist agitations in Southeast Nigeria?
2. To what extent do the responses of the IPOB to the perceived marginalization represents the views of the Igbo ethnic minority in Nigeria?
3. To what extent have IPOB agitations affected peace in the Nigerian state?

6.1 Factors contributing to the separatist agitations in the Southeast Nigeria.

The first research questions this study aims to answer is to highlight the core causes of the unending secession activities in the Southeast Igbo territory of Nigeria. Therefore, based of the responses generated from the leading and follow-up questions to the participants, the following were their opinion about leading causes:

6.1.1 Memories of the Biafran Civil War

The narrative of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) appeared constantly in the responses of almost all respondents from the Igbo ethnic group. Even the younger Igbo respondents, the post-war generation, gave their accounts and perceptions of the civil war in response to the Nigeria-IPOB conflict. It is crucial to note that there are many sides to the history of the Biafra War. According to Onuoha (2013), the Nigerian government is determined to reshape the war's official history, memories, and narratives to fit its own agenda, politics, and worldview. Nevertheless, there is no common viewpoint regarding how the Igbo youth perceived the Biafra War. One major issue is that the post war generation of Igbo people had heard the story from either their parents or grandparents. For instance, when I asked during the focused group discussion (FDG) if there is a link between the narratives of the Nigeria civil war and recent IPOB agitations, one of the respondents expressed that:

> *"Take for example, within this group, if one of us is Hausa, and another one is Yoruba, while the next person is Igbo, the three of us would have three different thoughts about ourselves because of the three different stories of the Biafra war we might have been told by our parents or grandparents. To be honest with you, we are still following what we were told about ourselves in this country" (Focused Group Discussion. – FDG 1, his response was translated from Pidgin language to English language[13])*

Considering the above response, the story that is conveyed determines how one remembers the Nigeria civil war. Some respondents did not find the Biafra war event to be as upsetting as others, but many saw it as unfair and thus becoming 'transmitted trauma'. According to Maiangwa (2016), "groups and individuals can become deeply ethnocentric and violent if they perceive that they are under threat or feel a grave sense of collective injustice due to unaddressed legacies of violence, which not only hurt the victims but passed on through generations" (Maiangwa 2016, pp 46). In the Nigeria-IPOB situation, the perceptions of the civil war's memory are expressed in two forms which I discuss below:

6.1.2 The feelings of historical injustice and sense of victimhood.

As I have discussed earlier in Chapter Three (3), the Nigerian civil war was a key event in the history of Nigeria, and it has left a lasting impact in Southeast Nigeria. While it is not the main cause of the Southeast's ongoing separatist movement, it has contributed to the concerns and ambitions of the IPOB. When I asked another participant to know the extent the memory of the Nigeria civil war lingers, a participant who is an elder in the community responded:

> *"Since the end of the civil war, that is from 1970 and above, because of how we Igbo were treated during and after the war, there is no Igbo man that has agree that Igbo people be ruled under Nigeria till now. That is why at times we Igbos sit down and think, are we not part of Nigeria?" (Respondent 7).*

Also, another respondent noted that:

> *"...even though almost all the people that participated in the war are dead so the memory doesn't go on again but what is happening presently, how the Igbo people are currently treated in Nigeria, is reminding people of the war (Respondent 12).*

Considering the responses of my participants, people from the Southeastern Nigeria largely hold a sense of victimhood. Among the Igbo ethnic population, according to the perception of

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[13] Pidgin language is the degraded version of English language spoken in Nigeria in replacement of the correct one.

the participants, there are feelings that the Nigerian state has been harsh on the ethnic Igbos just because they once demanded to secede in 1967. In other words, they are constantly reminded of the civil war's memory by how they are currently treated in Nigeria. Again, the memory of the war also contributed to the perception that all other ethnic divisions in Nigeria are collectively working against the Igbos. Based on the response of a participant in the focused group discussion:

> *"...Igbo tribe are being cheated, let me tell you, we are being treated unfairly, you know right from after the civil war, Igbo people have not been seen as first-class Nigerian citizen. Another thing I know is that we were betrayed by other groups". (Focused Group Discussion – FDG 1).*

The statement above suggests that the memory of the Nigeria civil war left the legacy of 'Igbos against the rest'. When I probed further to know if the IPOB activities in the Southeast is connected to the 1967-1970 civil war event, one participant noted that:

> *"the Nigeria civil war is of course the same reason why the Igbo feel they are marginalized, they wanted the separation then but it led to a war, it's like the reason for the war has still not been rectified, nothing has changed, why we fought the war in 1970 I mean 1967 hasn't changed, with the promises the state made then nothing has been done about it. So, this is what brought about the grievances of IPOB, they came out with the determination of even if it's to cost us another [war] we are ready for it, it is funny because after the war was over, many were hoping for a better nation but is so disappointing to know that nothing changes. people are still feeling agitated because of this. (Respondent 1).*

6.1.3 Narratives of Hatred and Ethnic Differences

Responses from my participants show that one of the legacies of the Nigerian civil war is that it makes the ethnic divisions more glaring within the Nigerian state. Nigeria as a multicultural country with over 250 ethnic groups, according to Cornelius and Gregg (2013), each group has its unique language, culture, and history. The country is further divided into three major ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo because of the civil war, which strengthened these factions. Even though everyone in Nigeria is expected to have equal access to opportunities, the issue of ethnic diversity that developed following the civil war affects ethnic biases even when applicants are seeking jobs. According to a participant:

> *"let's take for instance, if a Hausa man is in the office, and he sees an Igbo man walks in, the Hausa man might not welcome him because he is not a fellow*

Hausa man. So, I don't even see how peace can reign in this country anymore. (*Respondent 2*).

Another respondent also expressed that:

> *"As we speak, if you go to the Nigerian federal secretariat, being an Igbo man, and you say you need to bid for a contract, those in charge of the contract will tell you it is not available. But if you wait after some period, and a Hausa man enters there and requests them that he needs the same contract they deny an Igbo man, would be offered to the Hausa man immediately, and he could be mobilized with fee to go ahead with the contract"* (Respondent 1).

Ethnic differences and disparities, as showed in the expressions of the participants above, is not new in Nigeria. It often creates tribal conflicts between the Nigerian national minorities. According to Ali and Yahaya (2019), tribal differences cut across entire Nigeria with a series of conflicts such as the Ife/Modakeke dispute and the Ogoni/Andonis ethnic conflicts, among others. But in the case of the Igbo ethnic group, as one respondent noted:

> *"...the problem we have with Nigeria is leadership and the problem of ethnic hatred". (Respondent 3).*

Ethnic hatred is one of the legacies of the Nigerian civil war, and this added to the concerns of certain individuals in the Southeast because it creates a sense of insecurity. Somehow, the event of the civil war appears to have weakened the engine that holds trust among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Even the Yoruba ethnic group from Southern Nigeria are perceived to be nursing hatred for the Igbo. As a respondent who is an elderly Igbo man explained that:

> *"The hatred is not only from Hausa to Igbo, but even Yoruba people also believe Igbos are thieves, they believe Igbo are wicked and all that. It has gone so bad, even when you try to be close and sincere with the Yoruba people, they will still be weary of you, they have that mentality that every Igbo person is desperate (Respondent 9).*

Considering these responses from the study's participants, one could assume that the distrust among the major ethnic groups became open after the civil war, and that has affected Nigerian national integration ambition.

6.2 The Perception of Marginalization

'Marginalization' was another frequently mentioned term by most of my interviewed respondents. Probing further, however, shows that 'marginalization of Igbo' does not mean the

same thing to all participants. One elderly Igbo respondent noted that the level of marginalisation can be viewed from three stands:

> *"…from 1970 till perhaps now, the marginalization of the Igbo can be divided into three, one from 1970-1979 during the first military regime, then from 1979 when Shagari came to power till 1990 when the first republic was started and from 1999 till date. (Respondent 11)*

While it is crucial to recognize that the causes of such agitations are many and complicated, respondents' perceived marginalization plays a major role in developing separatist views. A key factor for constant agitations was expressed by a young Igbo man in the Southeast of Nigeria:

> *"It is marginalization, that is what I can say is causing the IPOB agitation, as an Igbo man and a member of the group, that is what I always tell people that want to know why we are agitating (Respondent 15).*

In other words, in many respondents' opinions and perspectives, marginalisation was seen as a key factor. Some believed that the Southeast people were neglected and not treated equally with other areas and ethnic groups in Nigeria. The main reason for the feeling of being marginalized was emphasized by a participant who stated that:

> *"…first and foremost, look at the issue of marginalization. An Igbo man feels he is excluded from a major part of Nigeria, what I mean is resources sharing, you know an average Igbo man feels he's deprived. (Respondent 9)*

From this view, it could be depicted that the main grievance made by IPOB is that they believe the Southeast area has not benefited fairly from resources and development compared to other parts of the country Nigeria. They contend that the Southeast has suffered from economic inequality and underdevelopment, because of Nigerian government federal neglect of infrastructure projects, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and other important services that will be explored in the subsection. However, a respondent who is also a member of the IPOB, claims that the agitation brought on by marginalization was widespread and did not just affect their Southeast region, according to him:

> *"…there has always been agitation, the Southwest that belongs to the Yoruba ethnic group is also agitating now. I will tell you that marginalization is fueling separation. We Igbo people are marginalized (Respondent 14)*

Thus, from my respondents' points of view, I categorize 'marginalization' into two: Political marginalization and Economic Marginalization, which I discus in the next subsections.

6.2.1   Economic Marginalization of the Igbo Ethnic Group

Economic marginalisation has been identified as a major cause of agitations by different neo-Biafra organisations in the Southeast including the IPOB. Some respondents who believe in the Biafra dream contend that the Nigerian federal government has economically marginalised and neglected the Igbo region, which has caused resentment and a sense of unfairness among the Igbo populace. This economic marginalisation, according to some respondents, were perpetrated through different means. The first step to marginalize Igbo economically started with the geopolitical zoning of Nigeria. According to an elderly Igbo respondent, when I probe to know what economic marginalisation means to him and how he thinks Nigerian state made it possible:

> *"You can notice a structural marginalization of the Igbo through the state creation, the military created 36 states as we have it now, Igbo have five and we have six geo-political zones, the south-east happens to have five while other zones have six or seven (Respondent 11).*

The respondent's view above suggests that Nigeria's states creation through geo-political demarcations allows uneven allocation of the Nigerian commonwealth. While it is said that the despair and disappointment that underpin separatist sentiments are fuelled by the absence of economic prospects, a better standard of living for all citizens could have silenced ethnic sentiments. Thus, demands for self-determination and a desire for more power over economic resources may follow, creating room for continuous separation activities. It was also noted that, despite that Igbo people are known for a variety of commercial techniques, a lack of infrastructural development has limited the population's economic prospects. Going further, the respondent reacted that the Nigerian federal government has imprinted the feeling of marginalisation in the Igbo ethnic group more than within other ethnic groups in the country:

> *"You see the government restructured other places instead of the place where the civil war actually happens, there was certainly no restructuring, economically they started building different companies and started siting them in different parts of the country except in the Southeast part of the country (...) they constructed railways across Nigeria, there is one in the southwest and one in the northern part of the country, but none in the Southeast. (Respondent 11)*

A recent development I observed during my field work is the redesign of Nigeria's Naira currency. This financial policy had a general impact on the country because the previous Nigerian naira currency was retrieved from circulation for the redesigned notes. This resulted

in scarcity of the old and new naira notes particularly in Igbo areas of Southeast Nigeria[14]. Due to that, some Igbo community members perceive the financial policy as an intentional attempt to weaken Igbo people's financial base in relation to other ethnic groups. This perception is captured in a respondent's statement below:

> *"Hausa people are still collecting the old note and if they go to the bank, bankers will collect it from them because they are the ruler of Nigeria, but if we Igbo take our old currency to the bank, the bank will not accept it why".* *(Respondent 12)*

The statement above feeds into a widespread perception that Nigerian government policies are detrimental to the growth of the Igbo business and marketing. Igbo people are recognized as traditionally and culturally business oriented ethnic group in Nigeria. Every 3 of 5 business individuals in any village or city in Nigeria tend to be Igbo persons. One respondent, when I asked what motivated the IPOB's activities, he contended that the IPOB agitations are predicated on the fact that Igbo people are marginalized economically in Nigeria, thus:

> *"...another reason is that the Igbo are very industrious, so wherever they settle they always triumph in businesses, but in doing that, you just find out that some government policy will hinder such idea, why because it is coming from an Igbo man. When an Igbo man decided to be importing a particular good, you start counting your loss from there. (Respondent 1)*

The response above and others revealed that participants believe the Igbo people are marginalized on their means of livelihood and marketing activities. Igbo people are noted for setting up self-establishments, in contrast to other ethnic groups in Nigeria whose teeming unemployed population are pursuing white collar professions in the civil service and other government parastatals. Thus, private commercial enterprises are seen as directly being threatened once Nigeria government regulations are strict against them. It is however perceived that Igbo business owners are likely to be interested in any suggestions, including the idea of secession, if they are assured that their business activities would run without interruption.

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[14] For example, when I came to Nigeria for the study's fieldwork, I arrived in Lagos, Southwestern part of Nigeria, the old and new Nigerian currencies were still in circulation. Meanwhile, but by the time I got to Abia State, Southeast Nigeria, there was scarcity of both old and the newly redesigned currencies. See the methodology chapter of this study, I explained how this development became one of the limitations of the study.

6.2.2 The political marginalization of the Igbo People

Participants suggested another unique cause of the separatist demand by the IPOB as being the perception of political marginalization. In Southeast Nigeria, a section of the people has ascribed the continuous separatist activities to political marginalization because they believe they have been cut off from genuine political engagement. This was also affirmed by a community leader who stated that:

> "...Yoruba has ruled Nigeria, and Hausa has also ruled many times, but they never give Igbo a chance even one term talk less second time so that is why we are thinking maybe they did not count us as part of Nigeria" (Respondent 7).

Considering the statement above, advocacy for Igbo people to separate from the Nigerian state might be fuelled by the perception of political exclusion. Especially, crucial decisions that affects everyone in Nigeria as a country are being made by the political leaders. With the scheme of things, it is believed, according to the expressions of the respondents, that the ethnic group or a region where the Nigerian president comes from, would enjoy the larger percentage of the Nigerian national wealth. This may be linked to why every ethnic group desire to have their people at the helm of the Nigerian federal government. A respondent who is IPOB member noted that:

> "...if you want to tell me that we are equal why not the Igbo man rule this country even for four years, whenever the time comes, many people will say Igbo man can never get there, why? And they want us to stay as one Nigeria. It's not easy that is why Igbo people form this IPOB. They wanted to separate themselves from Nigeria" (Respondent 15).

According to the response of the participant above, one may assume that it is not accidental that no Igbo man has been able to become the President of Nigeria after the civil war.[15] Considering the arguments of Nnoli (1995) that following the civil war, Nigeria's long-term national development plan and political leadership started to prioritise Northern Nigeria. Thus, the electoral patterns of the previous Nigerian presidential elections also showed that people voted along ethnic lines. The election results from the 2023 presidential election demonstrated

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[15] See a table of the past Nigerian presidents and the ethnic groups from 1966 to 2015 in Johnson & Azeez Olaniyan (2017). The incumbent president (as of 2023) is also from the Yoruba ethnic group.

that the highest number of Southeastern Igbo electorates supported an Igbo man who ran for president of Nigeria.[16]

My time conducting the fieldwork for this study coincides with the presidential election period in Umuahia, Abia State, both the election buildup activities and results confirm Igbo people's determination to produce a Nigerian president. In essence, the perceived inability for any Igbo man to become the president of Nigeria, and because the Northerners[17] have majorly been producing Nigerian presidents, brought to the fore the notion that the northerners are 'born-to-rule' Nigeria. To this effect, another participant noted that it is not the Southeastern Igbo ethnic group alone that are dissatisfied with Northern domination of Nigeria's political space. According to him:

> *"The northern people believe they are born to rule. So, other tribes that are existing in Nigeria should not enjoy such privilege. They are not born to rule. Then why? Now, you want us to be one Nigeria. Then we suggested that let Nigeria's leadership be rotationally, if Hausa rule let Yoruba rule, let Igbo rule but till today they don't want it. Then if we Igbo remain in this one Nigeria and cannot rule, are we going to be here as slaves? Are we slaves? It means that we are slaves! If the Northerners feel they can rule better, that's okay, then let us separate. Let them be on their own and let Igbo be on their own.". (Respondent 2)*

The response above does not only imply that one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria is willing to continuously rule the country, but it also suggests that other ethnic groups are not in consonance with someone from the Igbo ethnic group to become the president of Nigeria. The reason is that other ethnic group like Yoruba have produced the president if Nigeria between 1999 to 2023, and within the period, a Yoruba man was also the Vice President for 8 years. In this case, it goes beyond 'born-to-rule' syndrome of the Hausa\Fulani northern extraction. In what follows, another participant captured it more clearly:

> *"In my own opinion, I have met some people who are not Igbos, and when we were talking, they told me that they are afraid of Igbos. Yes, other ethnic groups are afraid of Igbo, they thought if they allow Igbo to rule Nigeria that Igbo people will divide Nigeria, that is what I heard. But I said, let them try it*

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[16] See Chibuzo Ukaibe and Kalu Eziyi (2023). https://leadership.ng/in-20-years-peter-obi-alters-shape-of-south-east-politics/

[17] I used Northerners in this study to mean the combination of Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups who occupied the Northern Nigeria.

whether it will happen or not. They didn't try it and they just think like that.
Let them try it first then we will know." (Respondent 7)

Other data gathered from the fieldwork suggested that the Igbo people's political marginalization, which has been widely reported, extends beyond the Igbo's ethnic group's failure to secure the highest political office in Nigeria, the presidency. It is also thought that the Nigerian security apparatus such as the Nigerian Armed Forces and Police. Johnson and Olaniyan (2017) provides a table of illustration which established that between 1999 to 2017, only Lt General Azubuike Ihejirika, was elevated to higher rank of security chief. The table of the security chiefs is dominated by the Army, Air, Naval chiefs from the Northern and other parts of Nigeria. Thus, the marginalisation of the Igbos in the Nigerian security sector was also emphasised by one of the participants who noted that:

> *"…Come to Nigeria police, since 1960 till today no Igbo man has ever headed*
> *the Nigerian police, come to the National Security Council adviser, no Igbo*
> *man since 1960 till date has headed it, come to the Navy no Igbo man has ever*
> *headed since 1960 go to the Air Force, the same thing (Respondent 11).*

The data gathered from the interviews indicates that Igbo nationalist groups, such as the most current IPOB, get momentum to pursue their objectives because of the perception of political marginalisation. The obtained data shows that, policies and post-civil war arrangements have reduced the Igbo ethnic group to the status of perceived second-class citizenship in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Tola Odubajo's argument that the Igbo ethnic group is marginalized and are only surviving because of their community structure and capacity for collective self-expression (Odubajo, 2023).

6.3   Perceptions of Marginalization: IPOB within the Broader Igbo Ethnic Group

This study's second research question is to assess the IPOB's activities as an ethnic-based organisation to see how closely their demands as an ethnic-based organization aligns with the aspirations of the wider Igbo ethnic group. The purpose for this assessment is not limited to knowing if they represent the Igbo ethnic group, but also to understand if they enjoy the legitimacy of the ethnic group. Recent activities and operations of the IPOB in the Southeast Nigeria have raised the question of whether the group enjoys the approval of Igbo people. Also, there is a question of whether the elites of the Igboland agree with their demands. In other words, there have been a variety of responses to the group's designation as a terrorist

organisation and the arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kanu, its supreme leader, by the Nigerian government.

6.3.1 IPOB as a Group Representing the Igbo Ethnic's Interest

In Chapter Four (4), Allan Buchanan's Primary Right Theory argued that an ethnic group have the right to demand secession. Having applied this theory; another view is that it is not sufficient to only justify the ethnic group's right to secede without assessing if the ethnic-based group championing the course have the approval of the larger ethnic group. This view, according to Kim & Robert (2020), is the 'permissive criterion' that gives fairness to the ethnic individuals that such ethnic-based group claims can be advocated for. As clearly put by Webb (2006), any secessionist group must consider the permission of individuals, because the expansion of individual freedom is the ethical justification for secession or self-determination. In line with this permissive or plebiscitary viewpoint, this study assessed whether individual Igbos support or consent to the IPOB's conduct in Southeast Nigeria.

In my assessment, while requesting the participants to understand their views about the IPOB and their activities in the Igboland, I got some responses that suggest that the demands of the IPOB is closely supported. In one instance, when I asked a participant on weather IPOB enjoys the popular support of the Igbos, he noted that:

> *"IPOB is well known to Igbo people, we know this group and majority of us are associating with the group. The leader of this group, Nnamdi Kanu, who is currently in detention has the sympathy of many of we - Igbos. Most of us see IPOB as the only platform propagating the agenda of the Igbos. Through this group, we believe that the dream of the Igbos will be achieved. What every Igbo man is going through is that we are hardly represented in the governing of Nigeria. So, IPOB is a system that we can align with, and we are with them".* (*Respondent 1*)

The analysis of the above response explains why the IPOB's worldview appeals to Igbo individuals who have strong arguments against the Nigerian state. It could be said that the IPOB organization provides an answer to the dissatisfied Igbo ethnic nationalists and the multitude of Igbo youths, a way forward that will elevate their ethnic group to a level that they feel they deserve. This is also evidenced by the large crowd that often participate in IPOB protests and demonstrations against the Nigerian federal government. Despite this, there are also some reservations about the activities of the IPOB in the Southeast. In responding to a follow-up

question that I asked to know if all IPOB's activities are welcomed by the Igbos, an elderly Igbo respondent stated that:

> *"IPOB represent Igbo people but within us it's something else. They have some bad ones among them. Yes, among the group, the bad ones are the ones robbing and killing of innocent people. They are hiding under IPOB people, but they are not the main IPOB. As I could say, the organization don't kill, they don't rob but some bad elements hide under them trying to use that group to kill people, rob people and do all bad thing in Southeast. We don't appreciate that. I personally don't like it; that violent way, I don't like that." (Respondent 7)*

In my interactions with the Igbo ethnic members, it was realized that people agree with the demands of the IPOB and what the demands stand to gain in the long run. Furthermore, there are some shows of displeasures with the group's operational activities. Although, Pakalova (2010) indicates that as demands for secession continues, there is a potential for some activities to violate individual rights and freedoms. Having established the above, to minimise further terminological ambiguity, the analysis below highlights what the core demand of IPOB is, based on participant responses.

6.3.2   Self-determination or secession, IPOB's Basic Demand

The IPOB's basic demand as a reaction to the perceived marginalization of the Igbo ethnic group remains incoherent in some respect. It is mostly argued that what the group demand is to secede from the Nigerian state, and to form a sovereign state called Biafra. Simultaneously, the aspirations of other sections of Igbo ethnic group departs from IPOB's secessionist aspirations. What I noticed during the interviews demonstrates the dynamics.

In the conceptual clarification chapter, I clarified what self-determination is, and what secession means. It was also established that indigenous peoples usually advocate for their rights to self-determination, while national ethnic groups mostly demand secession (Henry Minde et al 2008, Allan Stephen 2011, Harry Beran 1984). In other words, respondents have different views as to whether the Igbo people should separate from Nigeria, or they should remain as part of Nigeria but have the political and economic autonomy. According to a participant in a group discussion who claims the membership of the IPOB, when I asked him about the organization's basic demand, he noted that:

> *"Yes, we are not developing as we wanted to, so when we leave, when we get to our country and leave, we will be more developed than this, so these is one*

the reasons I feel Igbo people should leave Nigeria to form our own country"
(Focused Group Discussion – FDG 2)

The above response succinctly explains secession. And in my engagements with IPOB members and those who are not members but have sympathies for the group, the feelings have been for the Biafra dream of becoming a country of Igbo people to become a reality as soon as possible. At the same time, many of them prefer a process that will not spark a civil war like what occurred between 1967 to 1970 when the issue of Biafra was first raised. It is also disclosed through the responses that what the IPOB is fighting for is a just course, but the notion of separation of Igbo from Nigeria is unjust. According to a respondent:

> "*I will love Nigeria together. We need ourselves together, so IPOB is fighting for the right cause in a wrong way and as for me, I don't support them on separation. I know why they are fighting but I think if the country is united as a country, there will not be need for separation. I don't think we Igbos fighting for separation is helping anyone, it is not helping anybody. We Igbos, even if we succeeded in the fight for separation by peaceful means, it will be hard to just leave Nigeria, we have been living together for a while now, not because of that, even if you tell Igbos that are in other parts of Nigeria to go home, to go to their states, they cannot stay back home. They want to go out of Igboland to make money, to explore their businesses so we are good together*"
> (*Respondent 9*)

The interview above shows a different perspective to the IPOB's separatist demand and the notion of autonomy or self-determination, that business-oriented Igbo people who have businesses across Nigeria hold. When it comes to the viewpoints of individuals who operate their enterprises outside of the Igbo's Southeast territory, there is a fine line between complete secession of Igbo from Nigeria and Igbo autonomy within Nigeria. The findings from my interactions with Igbo people, whose relatives live in other cities in Southwestern territories of Lagos and Akure, indicate that such persons prefer to be recognized and treated as equals in Nigeria rather than being separated.

6.4   Arrest and Detention of IPOB's Leaders

In Chapter Two (2), where I discuss the context of the study, I observed that secession is prohibited under the Nigerian constitution, the Africa Union Constitutive Act, being the body of the principles guiding African States. Additionally, these documents do not give any consideration for ethnic groups in Africa to separate from their host states. Instead, the rights and freedom of the peoples are protected within their countries. Even though IPOB adopts the

term "Indigenous", perhaps so that the group is protected by the rights of indigenous peoples, it doesn't appear to work in Nigeria. According to Barume (2009), after the UN Declaration of Rights of the Indigenous Peoples at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2006, African countries argued that all Africans are indigenous peoples. In what follows, Nigeria was one of the six African countries that abstained from such declarations. Considering this, the Nigerian state does not recognize the proclamation. Therefore, the leaders of the IPOB are always on the watchlist of the Nigerian state. Particularly, the supreme leader of the organization, Nnamdi Kanu, has over the years been subjected to continued detention and incarceration. Several responders noted that the detention of the IPOB leader had altered the group's demand's momentum. According to a participant:

> *"Before, IPOB members were going about their activities very well. But after the IPOB leader was arrested, everything changed. Even Nnamdi Kanu said that he supported regional government. He said it in a meeting that was held in Enugu State before he was arrested. Everyone now know who Nnamdi Kanu is, he is a hero"* (*Respondent 9*)

According to this response, things were going smoothly for IPOB before its leader was detained. From the opinion of the respondent, the group's earlier demand was the recognition for the Igbos in Nigeria, including the Igbo's economic autonomy within the Nigerian state. However, the intervention of the Nigerian state in the group's activities through the arrest and detention of their leader brought the attention of the people to the group and increased the acceptability of the group's ideology. This response is however consistent with Nwangwu (2022)'s view that the IPOB started by using non-violent tactics to secure Igbo's autonomy. Again, another participant who is a community chief in the study area also reacted that:

> *"If Nigeria wants to achieve peace, then they should release Nnamdi first and foremost. If they release Nnamdi Kanu from detention, peace will reign in the Southeast. As I have heard, some people are afraid that maybe if they release Nnamdi Kanu from detention, that there will be a problem. He should be released first; he has not done anything bad."* (*Respondent 6*)

To be clear, all other responses pertaining to the detention of the IPOB's leader therefore reflects two fundamental observations. First, how the detention changes the direction of the group's demands, and in addition, how it impacted on the group's engagement with the Nigerian government. On the first impact, it could be said that as soon as the group's leader was detained, members resolved to keep the group functional at all costs. On the other hand, the group's

determination to continue pushing for the relevance of the group and release of its leader from the detention, informs the third research question below.

6.4.1 The Nigeria-IPOB Conflict: Strategies and Their Impact on Peace

Nigeria-IPOB conflict is noted to have created tensions in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. Since the Nigeria's constitution neither guarantees separatist demands, nor is it a party to any treaties that may force the state to recognize indigenous peoples' rights, it could be said that the country responded decisively to IPOB. Consequently, this strategy of the Nigerian state might have invited reactions that led to violence and have negative impacts on peace in Southeast Nigeria. Considering this, respondents reflected on how the strategies of both the Nigerian government and the separatist group have impacted the stability of the region and of Nigeria as a whole.

6.4.2 The Nigerian Government Repressive Strategy

In Chapter Three (3), I discuss how the Igbos attempt to secede from Nigeria under Chukwuemeka Ojukwu's leadership between 1967 and 1970, is the most extreme effort in the conflict's history. In the Biafra War, the Biafra troops were defeated by the federal military government led by the Head of State at the time, Yakubu Gowon. Furthermore, it could be said that since the Nigerian civil war, Nigerian governments have consistently stood against the resurgence of Igbo ethnic nationalism in South-East Nigeria through various strategies. Many Igbo nationalists view such strategies as repressive, as they target the suppression of the pro-Biafra protesters and take the form of extrajudicial killings, the use of lethal force, and military action (Amnesty International 2016, Guardian 2023). However, when I probe to know how my participants observe the Nigerian government's reactions to the IPOB's activities in the Southeast, a participant noted that:

> *"What the government was trying to do was to shut down the IPOB group. The Nigerian government wants to block the observations and every criticism raised by this group. So, the group began to gain lot of sympathy, people began to associate themselves with the group, especially during the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu. The federal government sent solders to clamp down on whoever that is identified with the group, in fact, soldiers were going to the shops, offices and people's houses to check if they could see anybody that have any kind of symbol or flag related to IPOB, if found, the person will be arrested, and you might not find such person again. It's like some arrested people just vanished." (Respondent 1)*

When another participant, a member of the group, was asked about the government response to the IPOB agitations, he said:

> *"Nigerian government is trying to force everybody to be part of the one-Nigeria aspiration. They are forcing us, that is why they arrested Nnamdi Kanu, even court granted him freedom they still hold him till now. They are not making any effort to restore peace in the country, all they know is to force Nigeria's unity all costs. Remember Boko Haram? You know how they have been killing the people? The government and those in the North know about it, and if you say the truth today, they[government] will come and arrest you tomorrow. Our government don't want anyone to say anything, all the government know how to do is to force people. (Respondent 6)*

While the quote of the first participant observes the Nigerian government repressive strategy to silence any idea of secession in Nigeria, the second comment compares Boko Haram's terrorist activities in northern Nigeria but which the Nigerian government gave a 'soft landing'[18]. According to the first respondent, the Nigerian Army invaded the Southeast Nigeria violently to inflict terror on a separatist organisation. Besides, another participant holds that the former Nigerian President, Mohammadu Buhari, who is a Northerner, has a special hatred for the Igbos. According to him:

> "*Buhari even said it that 'I will teach them in the language they understand, Buhari said it, he said that 'Igbo is a dot in the circle' he said that South-south, Southwest did not support the Igbos and Middle Belt did not support the Igbo, that Igbo is a dot inside the circle, didn't you hear?" (Respondent 1)*

The above response of the participant indicates that the Igbo ethnic group are seen as encircled within the Nigerian state. That is, Igbo people are surrounded by other groups that have no ambitions to separate from Nigeria. While the former Nigerian president did not put his words as the participant had said, or even mentioned Igbo, his words still sounds similar. The former Nigerian President said in an interview in 2021, according to Deborah Tolu-Kolawole (2021):

> "*That IPOB is just like a dot in a circle. Even if they want to exit, they will have no access to anywhere. And the way they are spread all over the country, having businesses and properties, I don't think IPOB knows what they are talking about. In any case, we say we'll talk to them in a language that they*

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[18] In Nigeria, particularly in Southern Nigeria, some individuals believe that the Boko Haram terrorist sponsors are shielded by the Nigerian government. However, when the Nigerian military targets separatist activists in Southeast Nigeria, sometimes using severe tactics, people often question why the same steps are not being taken against Boko Haram extremists in the Northern (Northeast) Nigeria.

The Igbo people was mentioned as an ethnic group in Mohammadu Buhari's statement above, but IPOB appears to have been substituted in place of Igbos. Nonetheless, the statement could be explained from two perspectives. On the one hand, the former president observes difficulties in the aspiration of the IPOB based on the geographical location of the Igbo territory. In other words, in his opinion, it could be impossible to have a separate country that would be enclosed by Nigerian air and land spaces. Although, the former Nigerian president might not have taken into consideration Lesotho, a country enclosed by South Africa. Secondly, the 'language they understand' could man the adoption of a repressive strategy. Coincidentally, following the arrest of the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, and detention of other adherents of the group, the group has also changed its strategy. According to the study's participants, the change in IPOB's approach to their demands has affected the peace in Southeast Nigeria.

6.4.3   The IPOB's Sit-at-Home Strategy

The sit-at-home strategy was implemented by IPOB as a response to the detention of the group's leader by the Nigerian government. However, this strategy prohibits the movement of people and vehicles every Monday in the Southeast territory. Consequently, it has been shown that both individuals and businesses have suffered several negative repercussions. It is noted that after the use of force on IPOB members and arrest of its leader, the group considers periodic 'sit-at-home' instructions for two reasons. First, to call for Nnamdi Kanu's prompt release from the custody of the Nigerian law enforcement agency. Second, to continue the group's operations even without their head, to maintain the group's stability. Thus, Ezewudo (2023) claims that the sit-at-home initiative was developed in response to the "refusal of the federal government of Nigeria to release him [Nnamdi Kanu] made members of IPOB, through the media and publicity secretary of the group, Comrade Emma Powerful, to declare that every Monday would be sit-at-home until Kanu is released from detention" (Ezewudo et al 2023, pp 168).

When I asked the participants on their understanding about the sit-at-home strategy of the IPOB, some of their responses indicate that those who involved in violence and extrajudicial exploitation were not legitimate IPOB members. According to a participant:

> *"The IPOB we know formerly, we know them as people of Biafra fighting in*
> *favor of Biafra but later, they have fake IPOB. There are some fakes that form*

themselves out of the IPOB. They stole people's properties, people's lives, and everything, creating violence all over in the name of IPOB. But the real IPOB can never kill you, they don't shed human blood, they don't steal, they can never snatch any of your belongings. What the real IPOB fighting is for the freedom of Biafra." (Respondent 2)

Another participant, an IPOB supporter, also contends that:

"Many of these people causing violence are not in the group, although they call themselves IPOB, they don't have orientation, and they don't know what the group represent, but because they are not pleased with the way government just bring army to their community to kill, arrest and go just like that. So, those people feel that government cannot always do this to Igbos, because of that, they join the group and start hiding under the group to cause problems. And you know why they are doing this, they need food and clothing, so because of this need they resolve to go in a violent manner to get what they want. These people are the ones killing or kidnapping for ransom. They also harm who they perceive as government loyalist or government informant, they don't follow the ideology of the group." (Respondent 1)

Figure 3: An empty street in Orlu City in Imo State, Southeast Nigeria. (Source: BBC Pidgin, August 9, 2021)

Furthermore, during the IPOB's declared sit-at-home Mondays, streets across towns and villages in Southeast Nigeria are always empty. Thus, movements of humans and vehicles are strictly restricted. (The figure 3 and 4 show the effects of the IPOB's the sit-at-home declaration in different states, cities, in the Southeast Igboland of Nigeria)

Figure 4: Figure 4: An empty street in Onitsha in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria. (Source:Ikenna Obianeri, Punch Newspaper, 16th February 2022)

In other terms, since the Igbo people are traditionally business inclined, the collective way of life of the people is thus put at risk by banning all public transportation and other corporate operations on Mondays. Thus, businesses, schools, banks, transit firms, markets, and other important services are compelled to remain closed on Mondays (Onichabor, 2022). It is said that residents of Southeast Nigeria would not have followed the commands of the IPOB to stay at home, had it not been for the fact that dissenters must be ready to face perilous consequences. As reported in a Nigeria's Vanguard newspaper, "death threats were issued to the people and even security operatives in that regard. The IPOB directive insisted that the weekly sit-at-home would be in force until Nnamdi Kanu was released unconditionally by the federal government" (*Vanguard* 2021).

6.4.4   The Eastern Security Network (ESN)

The Eastern Security Network (ESN) is a subgroup within the IPOB organizational arrangement. The security network is said to have been created as a strategy to keep the Fulani herdsmen from Northern Nigeria away from the Igbo's Southeast territory. Furthermore, one of the study's participants who is a member of the IPOB discussed what necessitated the formation of the ESN. According to the participant:

> *"It was the activities of the Fulani herdsmen that bring about the birth of this group, before the deadly actions of the Fulani herdsmen there was nothing like*

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ESN, the IPOB were just having their meeting normally, sometimes demonstration, but the highest they did was through the radio Biafra where they insult the government, beside this nothing else. It was the call by the Igbo for protection that brought every day we hear different thing about the Fulani herdsmen, we hear how they are just killing people every day, they kill women, kill priests even some seminaries were killed which is uncalled for. So, Nnamdi Kanu and IPOB decided to come into rescue of the people from the torment of the Fulani herdsmen" (Respondent 15)

The response of this participant is consistent with the claim of Johnson and Olaniyan (2017), that, the diversity between Northern and Southern Nigeria became more glaring after President Buhari emerged as the Nigerian president in 2015. Nwangwu (2022) also claims that northern Fulani pastoralists usually get away with justice due to what was linked to sharing the same ethnicity with the former Nigerian president, Buhari. It is thought that IPOB responded to the imminent danger posed by the herders-settlers dispute in Igboland. The group therefore established the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in the Southeast. To respond to the activities of the Fulani pastoralists in Igbo's Southeast territory, ESN became a self-defence regional paramilitary across the region. According to Nwangwu (2022), the creation of ESN "led to a dramatic change of the group's separatist strategy from a non-violent mode to an armed struggle" (p. 42). While the ESN is said to be designed for regional security, a participant from the FDG claims its modus operandi is like terrorism. According to the participant:

"This one, ESN, is not for us, they are terrorists, instead of them to talk for the Igbos they kill the Igbos. Maybe they even collide with Fulani people to kill us, so this people are coward youth of nowadays. The are hurting people they are supposed to gather, and people know them, they know their houses, we know the bushes where they hide, we are supposed to go there one day and fish them out" (Focused Group Discussion- FDG 2)

But another participant who is IPOB group member contended that:

...our non-violent continues till perhaps in 2019 when we changed the modus operandi. The ESN was basically formed to checkmate the activities of the Fulani herdsmen that have destroyed some part of Igbo land, killing our people, women, and children, especially in Enugu and Ebonyi. Fulani herdsmen were killing us, they are carrying AK-47 guns, government seems not to know what to do about it, they look the other way. So, in law of nature man most protect himself, since the Igbo [states\provinces] governments claim that they did not have the power over the Nigerian police, they are helpless, the IPOB decided to come to Igbo people's aid and formed a vigilante group. ESN are operating inside the bushes and forests to checkmate the activities of the Fulani herdsmen who are also in our bushes. (Respondent 15)

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Moreover, given the claims of most of the participants, the ESN's method of operation was excessive, occasionally caused fear for people's safety, and generally had a detrimental effect on regional peace.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

In this section, I present the study's major findings and connect them to the notions of the theories and basic concepts. The discussion part is centred around three main themes: the IPOB's goal in embracing an indigenous identity to advance its demands; how the tensions between the state and its Igbo ethnic group have been impacted by Nigeria's democratic system; and how these conflicts have affected the overall peace of the Southeast Nigeria. In the concluding part, I consider all the chapters in the study and discuss the thesis's limitation and recommendation for future research.

7.1.1 The 'Indigenous People' in IPOB Context

According to Cunningham and Weidmann (2010), countries are oriented toward a specific ethnic group, in most cases, the largest ethnic group. Therefore, the remaining minority groups begin to strive for recognition within the national boundaries. In Nigeria, particularly, the struggle for recognition of the Igbo ethnic group of Southeastern Nigeria have embraced various means to be respected and recognized in the country. Hence, the agitation for the emancipation of the envisioned Biafra Republic takes a distinctive dimension, as the IPOB adopts the 'indigenous people' tag in their self-determination course.

The concept of 'indigenous people' is not new in Africa, as evidenced by groups like the San of Botswana, the Masai of Kenya, and the Amazigh of Morocco. However, the Igbos' characterization as indigenous people within Nigeria, despite their recognition as a major ethnic group, raises intriguing questions. 'Indigenous people' lacks a universally agreed-upon definition. For instance, the Sami people in Scandinavia were recognized as a minority or ethnic group before being considered indigenous, signifying that self-recognition alone might not suffice (Lantto et al 2008, p35, Minde et al 2008). In the Americas, 'indigenous peoples' refers to the descendants of non-European inhabitants in countries colonized by European powers, primarily in the context of New World[19] settler states, as noted by Will Kymlicka (2007). Within IPOB's context, the 'indigenous people' adoption seems strategic, possibly must have been chosen because of its advantage, considering the UN definition and the ILO

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[19] The New World is thought to be referring to the North and South Americas that were discovered by Europeans in the 15th Century.

convention. However, the idea's understanding among IPOB members varies, indicating potential ambiguity. when I asked some of the study's participants if they understood the idea of 'indigenous people' that the IPOB is promoting, they gave responses that indicated they did not or only have had the slightest understanding of the term. Considering the historical presence of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria's Southeast region, the claim to indigenous status carries weight. The adoption of 'indigenous people' by IPOB reflects their intention, emphasizing their distinct identity.

In the next section, I discuss how the Nigerian state configuration and democratic institution, through the country's adopted federal system could be influencing the Nigeria-IPOB's conflict. Although, it is argued that federalism is most appropriate to be adopted in multi-ethnic democratic states (Saideman et al 2022). Thus, Ray (2018) claimed that ethnic-based organisations could seek separation when the strain of political inequity is being felt by the larger ethnic group.

7.1.2   The Question of Nigeria's 'Ethnicized' Federalism

In the findings chapter, it was noted that several participants claim Igbo people are politically marginalized, and this cannot be disconnected with the mode of government in Nigeria. According to Egobueze et al (2021), the Nigerian federal system is a legacy of the British colonial control project in Nigeria. Adeniyi et al (2019) also argued that the constitutional conventions held in Lagos in 1954 and London in 1953 serve as the cornerstones of Nigerian federalism, which was established just before the country's independence in 1960. The North, East, and West of Nigeria were the three federating areas designated under the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954. Thus, one of the drawbacks of this federal system was that other ethnic minorities in these three regions did not receive enough attention, which is why internal uprisings began (Mohammed et al 2017). It could be said that because of the pressures from the numerous minority groups, 36 states were established altogether to address the problem of majority dominance[20].

According to Agbiboa (2017), in Nigeria, "the issue of federalism has become the litmus test not only to citizenship, but also of group rights and national integration" (Agbiboa 2017, pp 2). In effect, federalism is typically adopted by states with multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and

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[20] currently, Nigeria has 36 states(provinces) including the Federal Capital

multicultural setups to bring all these together for national cohesion. Meanwhile, the Nigeria's 'ethnicized' federalism is argued to be ineffective in this regard[21]. To be sure, Ugbem et al (2019) argued that arbitrary control by the majority ethnic group, the Hausa-Fulani is often concluded to be responsible for the weakness of federalism in Nigeria. Consequently, Nigeria's national economic and political power is overly concentrated in the central or federal government. Hence the federal government becomes more powerful, and to intensely attractive that every ethnic group wants to be represented at the federal level. This has created a competition because each ethnic group's aspiration is to access the country's economic and political powers. As contained in the analysis of Badmus (2009), the inconsistency in Nigeria's federalism created fertile ground for ethnic identity politics, posing a threat to the country's ability to maintain its statehood. Against this backdrop, disputes over resource distribution, representation, and self-government during the first republic, the 1963 Nigerian census controversy, incidents during the first and second military dictatorships, and the most violent and politically sensitive challenge to the Nigerian federal system—the secession of Biafra— are all still present (Mohammed et al, 2017).

Since the nature of Nigeria's federal system has further exposed the state to different ethnic divisions and group's violent agitations, in 2021, Nigeria declared IPOB a terrorist organization. In the next section, I assess whether extreme demands for secession could be a formula for terrorism or an act that resembles it.

7.1.3   IPOB's Secession Demand and Terrorism Comparison

Terrorism falls into the category of topics in political science, international relations, and security studies that lack a consensus definition. Terrorism is a notion that is susceptible to being used incorrectly; in reality, it has been assessed using religious criteria, an organization's activity, and discrimination against national minorities (Jochen 2016, Henne et al 2020). However, beyond the numerous descriptions or definitions for terrorism, Wilkings (1974) illustrated generators of terrorism as, but not limited to, 'ethnic discrimination, economic hardship, internal power struggles, and weak state institutions' (Wilkings 1974 cited in Wojciechowski 2017). In the argument of Pakalova (2010), there are some incentives that

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[21] In this thesis, I explore adopting "ethnicized" federalism for Nigeria because writers appear to disagree about the kind of federalism that Nigeria now practises. Nigeria is divided into the Federal/Central and the States/Provinces, with consideration given to ethnicity, tribes, and languages, even if its federalism cannot be referred to be 'ethnic federalism' as in Ethiopia.

terrorism offered to separatist agitations, in other words, it should be observed that some of the activities of separatism agitators could be likened to terrorism.

In the IPOB context, some of the group's strategies have been connected to terrorist acts as it steps up its efforts to achieve its aims while implementing numerous strategies. Consequently, on September 20, 2017, Justice Kafarati issued an order outlawing IPOB and declaring it as a terrorist organization in response to the request from the Nigerian Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami (The Punch, 2018). Despite this judgement, the United Kingdom was adamant to take the Nigerian state's decision to label the IPOB a terrorist group into consideration at the time. However, "four days after the outlawed group beheaded an army couple, who were on their way to Imo State for their traditional wedding, UK acknowledged IPOB as a terrorist organisation, directing that it should be excluded from its asylum programme" (Daily Trust, 2022).

According to (Boylan 2016), because of ethnic groups' dissatisfaction with the state's political policies and with goals ranging from eradicating political prejudice to obtaining independence, terrorism may develop. Therefore, it is possible to speculate that when separatist agitation is not given due recognition, more actions that could be classified as acts of terrorism are added. As a result, according to Ojo (2023), the Nigerian government mischaracterized separatist activists as terrorism to suppress their aspirations.

Even though, I presented in the theory chapter that primary right and remedial right theories acknowledge the ethnic group's philosophic rights to demand separation, the demand may lose its legitimacy if terrorism is connected to it. But I go into more detail below about how the Nigerian government used repression as a tactic to prevent IPOB's separatist demands, citing the battle against terrorism as a guide.

7.1.4 Nigerian Government's Strategy to Separatist Demand

Findings have shown that the Nigerian government attempt to crush the secessionists have been fuelling the Nigeria-IPOB conflict. It is crucial to note that the repressive strategy of the Nigerian state toward the separatist demands of the IPOB has been generating responses from other armed groups in the Igbo's Southeast area in Nigeria, including the so-called 'unknown

gunmen'[22]. Sadly, the separatist group and other subgroups have over the years engaged in reprisal attacks, many of which came with brutal consequences for Nigerian security operatives. Nwangwu (2023) finds that, between the 1st of February 2021 and the 6th of June 2021, not less than 39 police officers were killed by unknown attackers in the Southeast, 14 police stations were burnt, and more than 10 police vehicles were razed while ammunition was stolen. Again, according to Kuteyi (2021), 1,844 prisoners were freed by gunmen as they attacked a correctional centre (prison facility) and police headquarters in Imo State (Kuteyi, 2012). Out of 41 different attacks on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) facilities across Nigeria between the pre-election and post-election, 2019 and 2021, almost half of these attacks were carried out by unknown gunmen in the Southeast and Southsouth Nigeria (*Premium Times*, 2021).

Despite that marginalisation or victimisation of the Igbo ethnic group is claimed to be the main cause of separatist agitations the Nigerian government's use of disproportionate force in response to pro-Biafra organisations has not provided a meaningful cure. Again, the state's repressive inclinations seem to have made people sympathetic to many separatist groups and their aspirations to secede. It also gets clearer that the Nigerian government responds to IPOB activities in a way that either inspires more ethnic militias to drive the agitations with boldness or creates the impression that the Nigerian state is unsure of how to handle the problem.

7.2   Conclusion

In a general sense, colonisation has a significant impact as many ethnic groups that were merged by European colonial powers are questioning their union (Charles 2018). Particularly, Nigeria, one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, with over 250 different ethnic groupings, could hardly have avoided ethnic strife and secessionist conflict. Although, the Igbo ethnic group is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the country entered civil war between 1967 to 1970 because of the Igbo ethnic group's demand to secede. After the war, other groups of Igbo ancestry, including the IPOB, which adopts an unusual approach, have taken over the process of separating the Igbo people from Nigeria.

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[22] Following the arrest of multiple IPOB leaders in Southeast Nigeria, the entities commonly referred to as the "unknown-gunmen" were held accountable for a number of violent incidents, including multiple attacks on Nigerian security forces.

Although, the IPOB's demand does not seem clear from the start as to whether the group is advocating for the Igbo ethnic group to be given autonomy within the Nigerian state or an outright split. What appears clear, therefore, is the organization's show of displeasure over how the Igbo ethnic group is treated in Nigeria (Celestina et al 2019; Ifeanyichukwu et al. 2020). However, there is not much literature that describes Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria as 'indigenous people'. So far, not so much emphasis has been laid on the dynamics between an ethnic group or indigenous people. Thus, it is a popular opinion in Nigeria that Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Tiv, Ibiobio, and a host of others are ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian state. However, IPOB's initiative of 'indigenous people' in the discourse of Igbo ethnic nationalism reflects a new discovery. Therefore, it may be argued that the introduction of 'indigenous people' by neo-Biafra advocate into Igbo nationalism discourse is influenced by protective clauses in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of 1989, which is usually called ILO Convention No. 169, and the UN Charter of 2007. Thus, the UN Charter of 2007 stated that Indigenous peoples have the entitlement to exercise self-determination. This covers the freedom to choose their own political path as well as the pursuit of their own social, cultural, and economic advancement. The ILO convention also recognized the land rights of the indigenous peoples. Although, Nigeria joined the ILO since 1960, the Nigerian state has not ratified the ILO Convention No. 169, which affirms the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.

In this thesis' Chapter Two (2), I have attempted to assess Nigeria-IPOB conflicts from all available spectrums. The first attempt was to look at the broader picture of how the colonial construct of African states and borders are becoming a recipe for conflicts between African states and their ethnic groups. Thus, this study reviewed several ethnic-based organizations in Nigeria's neighbouring countries such as Mali, Senegal, and Cameroon to understand their contexts and fundamental claims. Therefore, in the IPOB's context, looking from the historical perspective, the study assessed how the history of the Nigerian civil war have been reconstructed in such a way that it promotes more conflicts and trauma. The other tragedy of the memory of the Nigerian civil war also demonstrates that the causes of the war, one of which is the claim of unequal treatment of the Igbo ethnic group, have not been addressed by the Nigerian state.

Theoretically, the Primary Right and Remedial Right theories were employed in analysing the right of a group to make demands complimented one another explicitly and provided a

philosophical backdrop for the thesis. Hence, the remedial right theory argued that when sufficiently convincing reasons are given by an ethnic group, most especially the reason that borders on past injustices, the right to secede should be considered. However, almost all minority groups in states that have the experience of colonization have a history of injustices. Either before the colonial powers created these states or after, the merger of different minority groups into one state set the stage for injustice. Although, the two theories could not be spared of criticisms, because, if all ethnic minorities and ethnic-based organizations like IPOB could make secession demands unrestrained, that might frequently be leading to "domestic anarchy". As noted by Anthony Vinci, "domestic anarchy arises when the state apparatus loses authority relative to non-state armed groups who are able to become the highest authority over their internal and external relations" (Vinci 2008, p 296).

Basic concepts used in this thesis are covered in Chapter Five (5). The body of knowledge demonstrates how frequently 'secession' is substituted for 'self-determination'. This study also considers how these terms are employed incorrectly when determining what the IPOB demands from the Nigerian government. Given this, the chapter further explains how self-determination might be obtained without a need for secession, and how an ethnic group could attain its independence within a state. While this conceptual framework relates to the topic of this thesis, that is, understanding the distinctions between these critical concepts, it also creates a pathway for further research to avoid the misconceptions and terminological confusions of those terms.

I undertook this research primarily for anyone to understand, among other things: *What are the perceived core factors responsible for the continuous separatist agitations in Southeast Nigeria?* Thus, I have used academic works related to all my research questions. In addition*,* through the qualitative research approach, my research adopts semi-structured interviews and FDG to obtain data to answer the research questions. The research also involved personal conversations with IPOB and other Igbo ethnic members, through which I was able to identify some of the main reasons behind the conflict. This thesis found that, the claim of marginalization of the Igbo ethnic people, strongly pointed to their inability to hold the highest political office in Nigeria, the presidency. Thus, since the end of Nigeria's civil war in 1970, they also have not been able to lead any of the country's armed forces.

Drawing from the findings presented in Chapter Six (6), the thesis agrees with existing research indicating that the marginalization experienced by the Igbo people after the Nigeria civil war

(1967-1970) not only rekindles the war's memory, but also fosters sympathy for any ethnic-based separatist group (Uwalaka 2003, Onuoha 2013, Obasi 2015, Johnson and Olaniyan 2017). This thesis' finding is also consistent with the argument that because Igbo people are technically edged out in the political equation of Nigeria, a majority of the Igbo ethnic group are in support of secession (Ibeanu et al 2016, Yerima et al 2016, Nwangwu et al 2020, Celestine et al 2023). Against this backdrop, my thesis contends that pro-Biafra organizations such as IPOB, have been gaining ground in the Southeast Igbo region, employing various strategies to express their discontent with the Nigerian state. Consequently, the Nigerian state's reliance on repressive measures to quell the demands of any ethnic-based separatist group has led to a stalemate. This unyielding use of oppressive state tactics is adversely affecting peace in Southeast Nigeria and raise significant humanitarian concerns.

7.2.1 Research Limitation and Suggestion for Future Research

Through the application of the primary right theory and remedial right theory, I have assessed the normative right of an ethnic group and its ethnic-based organizations to demand self-determination in the form of secession. In other words, both theories agreed that a group of people who have sufficient justifications could decide to secede or demand for their autonomy from the host state. Additionally, the data I gathered showed that many of my participants, who are Igbo ethnic group members, agreed with the IPOB's demand, even though they do not support the use of violent approaches. Overall, little information was gathered from Nigerian state representatives and officials. Therefore, there is not much literature on the Nigeria-IPOB conflict that demonstrates the Nigerian state's desire to end the conflict.

In this thesis, I utilized the interpretivism research paradigm. Through this approach, I addressed the research's central question: *assessing the root causes of the conflict and enhancing comprehension of the Nigeria-IPOB conflict*. Consequently, the thesis delved into how Nigeria's federal configuration fuels allegations of discrimination and marginalization, particularly against the Igbo ethnic group which necessitated the creation of IPOB. Consequently, the findings of this study align with the assertion that Nigeria's crude federalism serves as a breeding ground for ethnic marginalization and the Nigeria-Igbo conflict (Onuoha 2013, Smith 2014, Nwangwu et al 2020). However, future research endeavours should focus on a pivotal question: whether Nigeria should overhaul its existing system of government,

replacing it with an alternative model capable of accommodating the nation's diverse ethnic landscape more successfully.

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Personal Records

Audio Records of the Researcher and Participants

Transcript of the Interviews and Focused Group Discussions

The Fieldnotes