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## 10. An Endless Cycle of Secessionism. Intellectuals and Separatist Movements in Nigeria

‘Man has dominated man to his injury.’ – King Solomon.

In conceiving modern Nigeria, the British imperial enterprise underestimated the likely problems of merging peoples of diverse cultures into a common political unit.<sup>1</sup> With political independence, which became a reality on 1 October 1960, differences soon emerged as a serious obstacle to nation-building. In Nigeria, as in other African states, the first decade after independence saw the collapse of democracies, civil unrest, military coups and civil wars that left the blundering African élite helpless.

Secession has remained a source of serious concern in Nigeria's politics throughout its four decades of independence. From using threats of secession as an instrument in political negotiation, through several minority protest movements, to outright war, the inclination to construct national identities has remained pronounced throughout the country. This contribution aims to: (1) define the institutional setting for scientific research on issues linked to secession in Nigeria, which will help to clarify the conditions under which intellectuals are studying secession and the influence of these conditions on the overall issues linked to the subject; (2) examine the role of intellectuals and the social sciences within secessionist movements in the country; (3) identify the scientific subjects involved in secessionist polemics and review their exact contents.

Beforehand, an overview of the separatist incidents that have occurred in Nigeria since 1953 will be presented, as a background to understanding the evolutionary processes of nationalist consciousness among the country's estimated 250 ethnic groups. This chapter will concentrate mainly on issues connected with Biafra's secession (1967-70) and that of the Ogoni minority movement, which started in 1990 under the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). The views of both Nigerian and foreign commentators on the national question will be analysed. Except where otherwise indicated, the views under discussion are those of Nigerian scholars.

## Separatist Movements in Nigeria: An Overview

From independence onwards, Nigeria operated a three-region structure, as instituted by the colonial government. The regions (northern, western and eastern) guaranteed autonomy only for the three largest ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east. While the Hausa-Fulani exerted substantial political control as the overall majority, the political and economic life of the nation revolved around the whims and caprices of the big three. This order soon saw the various regional minorities agitating for individual autonomy – a demand to which the three major groups were reluctant to accede. Towards the end of 1963, however, the minorities in western Nigeria were granted a separate (mid-western) region, which increased the number of regions to four.<sup>2</sup> This small concession was obviously not enough to quell increasing protests by minorities against majority domination. To make the situation worse, the large ethnic groups fought among themselves for control of the centre.

The challenge of Biafra (1967-70) marked the zenith of post-independence political brinkmanship in Nigeria. The horrifying passion that attended its thirty months of existence has today made the name 'Biafra' an anathema in the Nigerian geopolitical lexicon. Yet similar movements – albeit of lesser consequence – had preceded the Biafran one. In 1953, the northern region had threatened to secede, following a motion passed by delegates from the south proposing that Nigeria's independence should be granted in 1956. The problem was that the north was not yet ready to compete politically and economically with the south in an independent union. The proposal was then temporarily dropped so that the union could remain intact.<sup>3</sup> From this time onwards, secessionist threat as an instrument of political bargaining was a feature of Nigeria's political evolution.

In 1965, eastern Nigeria witnessed the first violent secessionist movement. Vexed by what was perceived as the federal government's unfair redistribution of oil resources, Isaac Boro declared the secession of his oil-rich Ijaw tribal group in the southeast. The rebellion, which failed to recruit mass support,<sup>4</sup> was suppressed by military action. Nevertheless, group protests continued without receiving due attention by the government until the eve of the civil war in 1967, when more autonomous entities, in the form of federating states, were constituted as a guard against multiple rebellions from aggrieved minority elements.<sup>5</sup>

The next serious threat to political stability came from the Yoruba tribal group, in the west. This conflict was sparked off by an attempt made by the ruling party, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) to break the strength of the opposition party, the Action Group (AG). The NPC was a predominantly northern party, while the AG belonged to the western region. The NPC showed little tolerance for its opponents in the 1964-65 elections. As a result, the west-

ern region became a battleground for power struggles. There were widespread riots characterized by the destruction of lives and property as the various parties engaged one another in bloody feuds. The situation was so serious that a state of emergency was declared in the region. Later, prominent Action Group leaders were arrested, tried and imprisoned on charges of treasonable felony. A couple of weeks later, on 15 January 1966, came the first military putsch to arrest 'this obvious break-down of law and order'<sup>6</sup> in the country.

Between one problem and another, in its manner of execution the January coup left the dangerous impression that its leaders – mainly from the Igbo ethnic group – were out to destroy the Republic's first government, led by the Hausa-Fulani, in order to pave the way for Igbo political ascendancy. This suspicion arose from the fact that while prominent politicians in the first Republic and top military officers of northern origin were killed during the coup, those from the east escaped unhurt.<sup>7</sup> Hausa-Fulani and Igbo differences worsened when the subsequent Igbo-led military government hurriedly adopted a unitary system of government, as opposed to the pre-existing federal structure. Soon, violent protests broke out in the north. For northerners, the facts pointed in one direction – Igbo-dominated government, economy, civil service, education, pro-government institutions and all the rest of it.<sup>8</sup>

As a step towards northern secession, a counter *coup d'état* was carried out by northern officers in July 1966. For a couple of months, mutinies against Igbo officers continued across the country. Some 30,000 civilian casualties were recorded.<sup>9</sup> The north designed a separate flag and composed a national anthem in a move to proclaim 'The Republic of the North'. Meanwhile, hostilities in the north were extended as well to other ethnic groups of eastern origin. An estimated one million refugees were driven back into the eastern region, bringing tales of their experiences in the north. Colonel Ojukwu, the eastern region's military governor, had to ask all non-easterners to leave since their safety could no longer be guaranteed following reported cases of revenge in that region.<sup>10</sup>

Later, taking account of two major economic considerations, northerners dropped their bid for secession. One, pursuing this goal would amount to denying themselves access to the strategic southern seas. Two, the region would be cut off from the promising new oil wealth in the southeast.<sup>11</sup> At this point, the new federal military government was confronted with the problem of restoring peace in the country. Usually, war starts in the hearts of men and ends there too. If this is accepted, it was evident that to avert the impending war would be a difficult task. Last-minute efforts to restore peace included an Ad Hoc Constitutional Review Conference in September 1966, during which the east insisted on the inclusion in the constitution of the right to secede. Then came the Aburi talks in January 1967 at the behest of Ghana's military leader, General Ankrah. While the Ad Hoc Committee failed to find a way forward, during the Aburi talks

Ojukwu brought others to accept the logic that all the regions first had to draw apart in a confederate framework in order to stay together.<sup>12</sup> This major but highly controversial agreement offered a brief ray of hope that the country might be saved from the impending disaster. Back in Lagos, the Aburi agreement was critically reviewed. Its full implementation would in effect have meant a sovereign Biafra and the end of the federation. However, the eastern region's leadership refused to accept any compromise. On 27 May 1967, the Nigerian government took a bold step in partitioning the country's four regions into 12 sub-states, in order to destabilize Biafra by fragmenting its cohesion.<sup>13</sup> The east was carved up into three sub-states. While the eastern minorities were granted their long-sought autonomy, Port Harcourt, a predominantly Igbo city, was left outside the Igbo state. To the Igbo, this act was tantamount to an open challenge to secede.<sup>14</sup>

At 2 a.m. on 30 May 1967, the birth of Biafra<sup>15</sup> was proclaimed with the following words:

The territory and region known as Eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelves and territorial waters, shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state, of the name and title, the Republic of Biafra.<sup>16</sup>

On 6 July 1967, federal troops began a campaign – initially termed 'a police action' by Lagos – to discourage the Biafran challenge. The rebellion, which later attracted the support of four African states,<sup>17</sup> eventually took the armed forces thirty months to overcome, leaving in its wake more doubts over Nigeria's oneness.

Post-civil-war Nigeria has seen efforts aimed at strengthening the basis of unity in the federal system. Southerners have asked for the power-base to be shifted from the north to the south as a condition for continued co-operation. Although there have been attempts to co-opt rival parties by forming coalition governments, as was witnessed in the first and second republics, since Nigeria's independence the north has dominated central control. In the 1993 presidential election, it looked as if it was finally going to heed the demand it had so long resisted, with the electoral victory of Chief Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba business tycoon. Unfortunately, the then military junta annulled the election without offering any plausible reason,<sup>18</sup> an action that provoked condemnation from the international community. In Nigeria, civil unrest paralysed all aspects of life in the western region, including in Lagos.<sup>19</sup> For months, the country teetered on the brink of another civil war, and citizens of different groups residing outside their own regions fled to the safety of their various ethnic enclaves.

While the impasse lasted, the Ogoni minority movement in the southeast (which could be seen as a resurgence of the previous Isaac Boro-led movement), was gathering momentum. The Ogoni, a community of about 500,000 inhabitants living in an area rich in oil, had been protesting against what they perceived as an unfair share of the oil wealth originating in their area. Under the umbrella of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), they boycotted the 1993 presidential election, insisting on being paid generous compensation by the federal government and Shell BP, the major oil company in the area. In response to the Ogoni initiatives of producing a national flag and anthem, coupled with periodic violent attacks on oil installations in the area, the Nigerian government under Abacha, the dictator, turned viciously on the Ogonis.<sup>20</sup> As the imprisonment of the winner of the 12 June 1993 presidential election had done before, the eventual execution of MOSOP's leader, Mr Kenule Saro-Wiwa, on 10 November 1995,<sup>21</sup> brought both crises to a stalemate.

So far, an attempt has been made to highlight the evolutionary course of secessionist agitation in Nigeria and the government's responses to the problem. Repressive measures against separatism in Nigeria have not been able to prevent its periodic recurrence. The worrying feeling persists that the federation may eventually break up.<sup>22</sup> With the ghost of Biafran secession still haunting the nation, and the Yoruba ethnic group not bothering to hide their grudges over the 1993 electoral injustices, together with the volcanic<sup>23</sup> nature of separatist movements in the oil-rich Niger Delta, a big question-mark hangs over the basis for national unity. For those communities on whose territories oil revenue is extracted, it seems there can be no happiness under the present federal system unless a fair share of this oil wealth is channelled back to their region. For most Yorubas, and other groups who are opposed to northern domination, the basis for national unity lies in righting the wrong of the annulled 1993 presidential election, won by the late Moshhood Abiola, a Yoruba. The election in February 1999 of Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, as the new Executive President of the federation is scarcely considered by Yoruba intellectuals as sufficient appeasement for the injustice of 1993. For the former Biafrans, especially the Igbos, until they are properly reintegrated into national affairs – and more importantly, are adequately compensated for the loss of those individually-owned lands confiscated by the Nigerian government during the civil war<sup>24</sup> – the struggle is not yet over. And for southerners as a whole, until the seat of power shifts from the north, the future of a united Nigeria appears uncertain. Listening to the strident calls for a sovereign national conference with the fate of the federal structure at the top of its agenda, one is left with the conclusion that the problem of secession in Nigeria is one of fanaticism – a stubborn refusal to change either the topic of discussion or its content.<sup>25</sup>

## The Institutional Setting for Scientific Research on Secession

In Nigeria, studies on separatism may be pursued under different headings that contain no direct mention of the word 'secession'. The scare of the thirty-month Biafran challenge remains so potent in the national psyche that governments over the years have resisted all attempts to be drawn into subjects dealing directly with secession. Although universities and individuals do pursue private scholarly research on secession, the bulk of this is actually centred instead on issues to do with nation-building. Social scientists in Nigeria are often engaged in discourses related to secession as members of pressure groups, cultural associations, social movements, pro-democracy organizations, political parties and labour unions such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).<sup>26</sup> For instance, a cultural association might organize a workshop to deliberate on 'the problems of federalism in Nigeria' or 'power domination by the majority'. Political science associations in universities, cultural movements, pro-democracy organizations (such as Action for Democracy (AD), the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) and the National Coalition for Democracy (NADECO), which Adonis Hoffman rightly identified as Nigeria's principal opposition group)<sup>27</sup> have in the past constituted forums where scholars have expressed their views on the national question. Issues to do with 'the problems of nation-building in Nigeria', 'problems of democracy', 'human rights' and other such subtle topics are usually explored. In such kinds of academic forums, politically engaged intellectuals present their views on some of these common national interests. Privately owned dailies and weekly tabloids generally cover these occasions.

Recently, some cultural institutions have been involved in the national debate on secessionism. One of these is the 'Oduduwa Cultural Association', a pan-Yoruba tribal movement, consisting of Yoruba intellectuals and politicians. In 1998 the group asked for the federation to be restructured in such a way that 'the people of Yorubaland will be governed like civilized and free people'.<sup>28</sup> Among other issues, this association also demanded that the army and police should be regionalized, since, it said, these forces 'under the control of the northern oligarchy, [have] become veritable instruments of oppression of our people'.<sup>29</sup> Another cultural group is the 'Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo', a pan-Igbo movement which, like that of the Yoruba, came into being at the height of Abacha's dictatorship government (1994-98). In a similar call, this association requested that the presidency should be reserved for southerners, in the interest of national peace. Recently Ojukwu, the former Biafran leader and an active member of the 'Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo', tried to find a justification for Biafra's war of secession in the rationale that, more than three decades after the end of hostilities, clamouring for the division of Nigeria still continues.<sup>30</sup> His statement has led to speculation on whether another Igbo republic could emerge.

The method of dealing with issues linked to national unity usually favoured by Nigerian governments has been to invite scholars from different ethnic backgrounds and of different ideological persuasions to participate in the constitutional talks that often precede the review of an existing constitution. Such talks address issues that threaten national unity. Past examples include the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference of 1966, instituted to deliberate on the crisis opposing the federal government and the eastern region; and the 1979 and 1987 constitutional talks which, like the others, involved a variety of élite groups.<sup>31</sup> The 1994-95 Constitutional Conference was held in the wake of civil unrest following the annulment of the 1993 presidential election.<sup>32</sup>

## Intellectuals in Nigeria

Before proceeding to examine the role of intellectuals in secessionist movements in Nigeria, it would be useful to clarify who may be regarded as an intellectual in that country. This need arises from the peculiar circumstances surrounding the emergence of the intellectual class in Africa – a recent phenomenon that came with the introduction of Western education to the continent by European missionaries in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The distinctive feature of the African intelligentsia is that it is often difficult to differentiate between an individual who has merely received a Western education and one whose mental activities merit the respect reserved for those who assume the position of ‘leader of thought’ in their society. In an African society where the majority of the masses are illiterate, the common assumption is that all who have achieved a certain level of literacy are intellectuals. This problem is compounded by the fact that the political élite in the new African states formed the bulk of the first generation of individuals to come into contact with Western education. They therefore jostle for the position of ‘leader of thought’ with those who are professionally devoted to the pursuit of the fruits of knowledge.

As stated by Tam David-West, the moral commitment of an intellectual may be situated in the broadening of existing horizons of knowledge. He is expected to ‘interest himself in a critical analysis of the political, social and economic morality of his society, with a view to suggesting better alternatives whenever he finds the status quo not good enough’.<sup>33</sup> Such an expectation of a critical intelligentsia corresponds to the self-image of Nigerian intellectuals. They have generally been influenced by a concern for social justice and for the protection of individual and group interests. Politically engaged intellectuals employ the tools of the social sciences in moving across their divergent positions during and after periods of national crisis.

Yusuf Bangura, who studied intellectuals, economic reforms and social change in Nigeria, arrived at the conclusion that the intellectual class that

emerged in the post-independence African states is under pressure to cultivate its roots in order to remain socially relevant.<sup>34</sup> More often than not, the Nigerian intelligentsia, whom Ayandele has characterized as being alienated from the rest of the society and torn between the forces of tradition and modernity,<sup>35</sup> collaborate and compete with other dominant groups for influence, power and resources. For the state, they can be called upon to provide intellectual input when the occasion demands, through their involvement in peace arbitration, diplomacy, public policy, constitutional talks and their provision of legal advice. As emergent leaders of opinion, they constitute a formidable part of civil society capable of exerting strong pressure that the state cannot ignore. On rare occasions, they may fight with arms, alongside the army. In normal situations, they are looked upon as a source of enlightenment, indispensable for modernization.

## A Generation Shift

With regard to incidents of secessionism, the role of intellectuals is undergoing a dynamic process of reconstruction. Changes among the intelligentsia also affect normative positions. This is highlighted by the recent emergence of a crop of so-called revisionist scholars who wish to differentiate themselves from the former generation of scholars. In the past, the efforts of Nigerian intellectuals were directed towards either the achievement of secession or its suppression. They were generally engaged in defending the interests of individuals or particular groups. The revisionists, who emerged in the late 1980s and the 1990s, attempt instead to address the national question from a perspective that transcends ethnic, religious and group prejudices. Thus, in relation to forces trying to pull the Nigerian state apart, revisionist scholars have examined social justice, corruption, ethnicity, human rights and minority rights, military dictatorship and legitimacy, autonomy and inter-group relations, and leadership, as well as other issues related to the imbalances observed in Nigeria's federal system. They focus their discussions on how to achieve a more stable Nigerian state, concentrating on developmental ills and seeking ways of modernizing the socio-economic and political systems. This objective is what dictates the inclination to 'system analysis' and normative evaluations of the Nigerian state observed in their writings.

Four or more reasons may account for this change in attitude on the part of Nigerian intellectuals. One is the fact that, as a younger generation of scholars, they are able to take a more distanced approach to the civil war of 1967-70 and other events of the past which have shaped the views of older scholars. Second, it has been realized that common problems afflict all sections of the citizenry, irrespective of group or ethnic identity. Third, it has become obvious to most intellectuals that secession is not the best solution to the problems facing the country



at present. The fourth point is that, with a higher level of education, the Nigerian intelligentsia is acquiring other characteristics. It is now easier to differentiate between a scholar and a guest writer.

## Self-Determination

With regard to the Biafran civil war (1967-70), the older historiography, as represented by some intellectuals of that era, focused a good deal of attention on either defending or condemning the activities of the army and the political élite who led the struggle. The bulk of this literature appeared in the period between the civil crisis itself and fifteen years after the end of hostilities. Some of these writers were engaged in Biafra's secessionist struggle, through the organization of public enlightenment programmes,<sup>36</sup> the articulation of principles and goals for the Biafran Revolution,<sup>37</sup> logistics, administration, weaponry, intelligence gathering and even participation in battle, as was the case of literary giant Christopher Okigbo, co-manager of the secessionists' Directorate for Propaganda.<sup>38</sup>

Given the unusual roles in which these scholars found themselves, passions for their own personal cause and that of the group they were defending remained higher than the idea of a national interest. Consequently, the older historiography in Nigeria very openly expressed partisanship in its discourse. This fact explains why the common feature of most discussions during this era was that writers either laboriously put forward justifications for the actions of some individuals or groups during the war, or levelled accusations against targeted individuals for their roles in the national crisis. Attempts to recover lost credibility were made by those who had played inglorious roles in the past. Among these were the 'right-wingers', who were opposed to territorial claims such as those involving Biafra or the Ogoni, and to any similar kind of militant agitation. This group tried to give the impression that they believed national unity was paramount and that the peaceful resolution of a crisis was more rewarding than the violent option. Yet in reality, as the revisionist scholar Chinua Achebe observed, these individuals tended to pursue such national ideals only when furthering their personal interests.<sup>39</sup> On the opposing side were the 'leftists', who regarded secession and war as justifiable under certain political circumstances.

Within the two different camps, however, were some scholars who had swapped from one position to the other. Nelson Ota, for instance, was among those at the forefront of the Biafran secessionist movement. During the course of the war, he dramatically turned against secession. He was the former chairman of the Features Committee of the Propaganda Directorate and editor-in-chief of 'The Biafran Times', and his book, *The Trial of Biafran Leaders*, published in 1980, reveals much about the inconsistent character and low level of credibility

of scholars like himself. When he changed sides, in 1968, he suddenly saw Biafranism as being devoid of genuine and honest leadership, alleging that Ojukwu's main aim was to carve out a personal empire for himself.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, his later involvement in the crisis was designed to defeat Ojukwu-led secession. As that of an insider in the ill-fated republic, however, his opinion supported that of Nnamdi Azikiwe who, after defecting in 1968, also concluded that the war had been 'precipitated not necessarily for the survival of easterners but for a more sinister purpose'.<sup>41</sup> In 1960 Azikiwe – an Igbo, who had actually composed the Biafran national anthem – had been co-opted under the First Republic's parliamentary system as the first indigenous president, with Sir Tafawa-Belewa, a Hausa-Fulani, as Prime Minister. Azikiwe later distributed pamphlets describing secession and the war as the result of Ojukwu's tyranny and desire to subject the eastern minorities to oppression.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in his book *Rebirth of a Nation* Kingsley Mbadiwe, a former Biafran ambassador, recounted how his opposition to secession led to his house arrest and other harsh treatment meted out to him by the governor of Biafra.<sup>43</sup> Although Mbadiwe stated his belief that the Igbos had been wronged, he expressed his regret that Nigeria was then being allowed to disintegrate by hardliners among the rank and file of the ruling hierarchies in both Lagos and Enugu, the former capital of eastern Nigeria.<sup>44</sup> Considering their conspicuous roles at the outbreak of the Biafran secession attempt and their dramatic change of views during the course of the crisis, it is hard not to suspect that Mbadiwe, Azikiwe and Otta were informed by their desire for self-rehabilitation in a united Nigeria.

Other Nigerian scholars opposed to secession – Horatio Agedah, among others – turned to journalism and diplomatic duties, in an attempt to counter Biafra's secessionist propaganda. They defended the Nigerian government's prosecution of the war and its terms for peace. In one publication, Agedah argued that, like United States President Abraham Lincoln who had fought against secession in 1861, General Gowon, the war-time Nigerian head of state, was fighting to preserve the national integrity of Nigeria and to save more than five million people in non-Igbo minority groups in the east, who had been forced under Ojukwu's rebel regime.<sup>45</sup>

In defence of Ojukwu the British scholar Frederick Forsyth, a 'leftist' in the context of this chapter, disagreed with those who condemned Biafran secession. He argued that the east had been driven out of the federation by persecution.<sup>46</sup> In his view, the ex-Biafran leader was the last person to want a division of the country. The decision to secede, he said, had to be regarded as the result of a popular choice made by the 335-strong Consultative Assembly – a high-level body of eastern Nigerian leaders who had been elected by their various communities to advise Ojukwu on Biafran secession.<sup>47</sup> N. U. Akpan, an opponent of secession, admits that after 1966 hatred of the Igbos ran so deep that civil war would

have been hard to avoid, with or without secession.<sup>48</sup> Akpan, like Forsyth, seems to over-stress the argument that a peaceful solution to the crisis at this time would have been impossible.

When self-determination for endangered people calls for self-defence, or protection against a lethal attack by an aggressor, it can – according to Allen Buchanan, in a study of secession which also covers Biafra – offer compelling grounds for secession, provided that the victims have not provoked this attack.<sup>49</sup> A similar argument has been used in the discussion on the civil war. As demonstrated in the document entitled ‘The Principles of the Revolution’, Biafran scholars, defending the legal basis for secession, maintained that Biafra was justified on the ground that the federal government (then) failed to check acts of genocide against easterners in the north. At that point, it was said, ‘Nigeria had become a jungle with no safety, no justice and no hope for our people. We decided then to find a new place ... that was the origin of our revolution’.<sup>50</sup>

The American scholar Donald Horowitz, who has studied ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, has asked why Igbos were the only group frequently singled out for attack in all the riots in the north.<sup>51</sup> Concerning the violence against Igbos in the period before the civil war, some analysts see the victims themselves as *agents provocateurs* and blame them for the fate that befell them.<sup>52</sup> Foreign scholar Walter Schwarz, in his account of the crisis, mentioned reports that the Igbos had taunted the aggrieved Hausa-Fulani over the death of their former leaders at the hands of Igbo military officers during the January 1966 military putsch that ended the first republic.<sup>53</sup> In addition, several scholars of the older generation, including the prominent Nigerian political scientist Billy Dudley, rationalized periodic violent actions against Igbos in the north as a product of the victims’ public misconduct. In his view, ‘the Igbos were attacked not because they were Igbo, but because the name “Igbo” had become more or less synonymous with exploitation and humiliation’.<sup>54</sup> Dudley therefore tried to isolate attacks against Igbos in the north from Ojukwu’s politics of separatism, maintaining that there were no premeditated plans to commit acts of genocide against Igbos or other easterners. In other words, secession by Biafra lacked a *locus standi*, as the accusations of genocide – on the basis of which Biafra pushed for secession – referred in fact to spontaneous actions provoked by the victims’ unchecked public exuberance.

Kenule Saro-Wiwa, a scholar of the older generation who in 1967 had strongly opposed Biafra’s secession, later became one of the most prominent members of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), which started out in 1990 as a social movement.<sup>55</sup> In a similar vein to the Biafran scholars, but this time with reference to the Ogoni struggle, he accused the Nigerian government of promoting social injustice, which he said was robbing Ogoni citizens of their rights in the federation. Saro-Wiwa also indicted the government on charges of

genocide, citing threats of cultural extinction in the face of environmental degradation. In his book, *Genocide in Nigeria, the Ogoni Tragedy*, Saro-Wiwa demanded autonomy for the Ogoni as a way of checking the actions of an unjust government. In an appeal to the international community to intervene to promote Ogoni self-determination, he stressed that 'if nothing is done to stop the federal government of Nigeria, the Ogoni people will be extinct within the next ten years'.<sup>56</sup> The Ogoni announced to the world their aspiration to greater autonomy (both political and economic) within the existing federal structure. Reconciling these demands with the acquisition of an Ogoni national flag, anthem and other insignias of distinct statehood probably amounts to what Muiywa Adeleke described as double-speak, in contradiction to the declared goals of the struggle.<sup>57</sup> According to foreign scholar Claude E. Welch Jr, who has conducted a study on the Ogoni struggle, the intellectual style and sophistication witnessed in the attempt to legitimize the movement indicate an interesting approach to the construction of ethnic identity.<sup>58</sup> From civil litigation at home against the federal government and Shell BP, the struggle assumed international status with the indictment of the Nigerian government at the United Nations General Assembly in 1994.<sup>59</sup> In effect, the Ogoni struggle became a cause that enjoyed popular support abroad but was resented at home. With international outcry followed by sanctions against Nigeria, Saro-Wiwa, at the cost of his own life, fulfilled his promise to bring shame on the Nigerian government over their treatment of the Ogoni.<sup>60</sup> Ben Naamen, who has reviewed Saro-Wiwa's account of the Ogoni struggle, sees most of his claims as propaganda, born mainly out of frustration and an undisguised desperation to put across the case of his beleaguered people. Naamen agrees, however, that the Nigerian government's indifference to the Ogoni was clearly unfair.<sup>61</sup>

A historical issue often raised in secessionist debates in Nigeria is whether a group has a right to secede on the basis of unjust annexation. The introduction of the subject of history into Nigeria's secessionist discourses challenges the change of ownership of the country from the British to the federal government. While Biafra's secessionist movement was not strongly rooted in historical rights of rectification, the issue of the historical right to territory did form a part of the struggle of the Ogonis, whose right was challenged by Yusuf Bala Usman. This historian argued that the territory today held by the Ogoni is first and foremost under the trusteeship of the federal government of Nigeria. In a seminar on 'The National Question', Usman, a Marxist scholar, contended that 'the Ogoni had ceased to own their land when they were conquered by the British in the nineteenth century, and the right to this land was transferred to Nigeria on independence'.<sup>62</sup> In a reply, Saro-Wiwa appealed to history, arguing that his people had the first claim to the territory since they were the first settlers there, and there existed no historical evidence of settlement by conquest.<sup>63</sup>

Some revisionist scholars who have considered aspects of the Biafran and Ogoni struggles in Nigeria assert that each of these groups of secessionists was involved in a fight for self-determination and human rights, as enshrined in the United Nations charter. The charter establishing the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), like that of the UN, condemns any interference in the internal affairs of member states.<sup>64</sup> While the clause on non-interference in the internal affairs of member states provided the Nigerian government with a legal ground for resisting separatism without outside intervention, the clauses defending human rights and the principle of self-determination were used by the aggrieved groups as a legal ground for nationalist agitation.

An elder statesman from a minority ethnic group in the western region, Anthony Enahoro, drew the debate further away from the territorial claims of the Igbos, arguing that 'if Nigeria is dissolved, there are no legal bonds to tie together the Igbos and other tribes of eastern Nigeria who would be [just as] entitled to self-determination as the Igbos.'<sup>65</sup> In other words, the Igbo-led eastern secession was unconstitutional because its leaders had no legal right to the entire territory they were aspiring to pull out of the federation.

Enahoro had also criticized the appeal for international solidarity made by those striving for the self-determination of Biafra, with the argument that the application of this principle in Africa would lead to a senseless multiplication of micro-states. Biafra, while aspiring to be a separate nation-state, realized the benefits inherent in making an appeal to 'pan-Africanism', a concept the secessionists tried to use as an instrument to legitimize their objective. In this call, all peoples of the Black race were summoned to join the revolution, which was later christened a Negro Renaissance. Ojukwu had declared at the time that the struggle was 'not just a movement of the Igbos (...) it is a movement of true and patriotic Africans.'<sup>66</sup> Biafra also highlighted the inflammatory potential of ideological differences between Christian and Moslem OAU countries. Biafranism had insinuated that the struggle was against an Arab attempt to overrun the Negro world as well as a fight against European colonialism.<sup>67</sup> Faced with the dangers of wavering opinions at the OAU, Enahoro, in an address to this organization in 1969, replied that if the wishes of Biafra were to be granted there existed a probability that Nigeria, which harboured over 200 different nationalities, would end up with at least 200 countries. And if Biafranization overran the continent, he added, the OAU would be contending with 2,000 member countries.<sup>68</sup>

From their discussions, it may be ascertained that scholars in Nigeria are of the view that the dangers of ethnic consciousness could increase in a situation where the government neglects the importance of social justice and merit in policies relating to national affairs. The stakes are further raised in a situation where the government takes a partial position during an inter-group conflict. Such acts of partiality might be demonstrated in an instance where it fails in its duty to

protect the victims of such a conflict, as was the case in Biafra during the riots in the north in 1966-67; or again where the government chooses the option of brutality and repression against a particular group, who might be protesting against a perceived injustice perpetrated by the state, as was the case with the Ogoni under the regime of Abacha (1993-98). Nevertheless, some scholars caution that such a cause could result in an inter-group conflict, and that the desire for secession is better approached with less violence by the aggrieved parties.

## Social Justice and Good Governance

One of the recurring issues connected with the problem of political instability in Nigeria is identified as the absence of social justice in the country. Nigerian philosopher David-West, in his definition of 'social justice', concludes that the term denotes egalitarianism, impartiality and non-prejudice, reward and punishment impartially dispensed.<sup>69</sup> Achebe has tried to explain how the denial of merit as a result of tribal, political, religious or sexual discrimination or other forms of partisanship constitutes 'a form of social injustice, which can hurt not only the individuals concerned, but also ultimately the entire society'.<sup>70</sup> In this analysis, Achebe explained that social injustice promotes the cult of mediocrity, defines the pattern of rewards and victimizes individual citizens and groups, as well as the nation itself. When people are victimized there will be no peace, he reasoned. Without peace, he said, 'no meaningful social programme can be undertaken. Without social justice, order is constantly threatened'.<sup>71</sup> Usually, it is expected that all citizens in a country will be treated as equals before the law and given unhindered access to available opportunities, and that the government will try to distribute social amenities fairly to all parts of the country. Furthermore, the state's security institutions are expected to provide adequate protection for the lives and property of its citizens. Consequently, when the state security apparatus is used to support or aid the oppression of a section of the country, questions are raised as to the legal right of this government to have a claim on the people.

As stated by Achebe, social injustice is a matter not just of morality but also of sheer efficiency and effectiveness.<sup>72</sup> With regard to the Ogoni situation, there is substantial evidence that the government has neither shown good morality nor responded effectively to the issues raised by the Ogoni protests. Dele Omotunde *et al.*, commenting on the paradox of oil exploration and the treatment of oil-producing areas in Nigeria, expressed incredulity at the extent of the federal government's neglect of these communities.<sup>73</sup> And Sam Olukoya, who investigated the deaths related to environmental pollution in the oil-producing areas, arrived at the conclusion that to the communities living in these areas oil exploration has become a curse instead of a blessing.<sup>74</sup> In the view of these authors, a morally

responsible government would have made some effort to make available basic social infrastructures such as, for example, safe drinking water, electricity, access roads, hospitals and schools. The government could also have staved off mass revolts if an effective programme of environmental protection had been pursued.

In this light, one may question what ends the government expected to achieve by taking repressive measures against its citizens when they were asking for their basic entitlements. In his examination of the legal basis for the Ogoni revolt, Maduabuchi Dukor, a Nigerian legal practitioner and revisionist scholar, likened the African state to a devouring monster in a mechanized and brutal order of things. Dukor referred directly to the dictatorship regime of the late Gen. Abacha, under whom all opposition met with an unprecedented level of brutality and reprisals. Within such an order, he said, 'there is a compulsive need to protest in order to salvage the innate goodness, relevance, integrity and sense of justice of man'.<sup>75</sup> Protestation, he added, is necessary 'to bring man back to the centre of the stage and to make him more congruous with his environment and with the purpose of his efforts'.<sup>76</sup>

While making the observation that there is a link between at least some of the emerging arguments, some other scholars, such as Achebe and Odunsi Bennett, a fellow revisionist, have presented an all-embracing perspective on the problem, with a special focus on leadership. From this standpoint, Achebe has argued that there is nothing 'basically wrong with the Nigerian character, its land, climate or water. The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership'.<sup>77</sup> In a painstaking analysis of the leadership problem in Nigeria, he stated that the country has not had the good fortune to be blessed with a visionary leader competent enough to unite, manage, remodel, discipline and restructure the society through an exemplary display of fairness, trust, honesty, sense of purpose, patriotism and accountability. These qualities, he said, are lacking in the array of pretenders who have paraded themselves as leaders since Nigerian independence. Different forms of social ills may obstruct the course of nation-building but, he argues, it takes a competent leadership model to bring about lasting change in society – change that other, lesser mortals could benefit from and that sets a standard for national consolidation.<sup>78</sup>

## Economic Discrimination and Mismanagement

Economic discrimination, a problem synonymous with Nigeria's unstable political history, forms part of a broader set of issues connected with social injustice which, as stated above, remains one of the major topics of discussion – and reasons for political involvement – of Nigerian intellectuals. Biafra<sup>79</sup> and the Ogoni<sup>80</sup> crisis arose mainly out of attempts to escape economic injustice. These

territories, while contributing the greater part of Nigeria's oil-based economic wealth, appear to have received less in the federal government's redistribution policies than other areas. While the facts indicate clearly enough that the redistribution of national resources to all parts of the country has not been carried out according to a fair system, some students of Nigerian politics have looked at the question from the point of view of the economic implications of corruption in national government.

According to foreign scholars Evelyn Rich and Immanuel Wallerstein in their studies of separatist movements in Africa (including Nigeria), a close link exists between corrupt practices in African states and the tendency towards secession.<sup>81</sup> This view has been buttressed by Ojukwu's assertion that the rationale for Biafra's secession was based on the need to eliminate widespread corruption, which he saw as the source of the general inefficiency and social decay in the country.<sup>82</sup> In the same vein, Saro-Wiwa contends that one of the central tenets of the Ogoni Bill of Rights is the quest for social justice for the Ogonis,<sup>83</sup> thereby using a broader definition of social injustice, which includes acts of corruption.<sup>84</sup>

According to Achebe, knowledgeable observers estimate that as much as 60 per cent of Nigeria's national income is regularly consumed by corruption, especially since the second republic, 1979-83.<sup>85</sup> In a study carried out in the Post and Telegram (P&T) Department of the federal ministry of communications in 1983, it was discovered that the government was losing a sum of approximately \$50 million a month in salaries to 'ghost workers'. Translating this into a yearly figure, this means that about \$600 million are lost to P&T in this particular racket. To illustrate the lessons of his findings, Achebe stated that the amount siphoned off into private pockets at P&T could build two more international airports, or buy three more refineries, or build a dual carriageway from Lagos to Kaduna, or pay the salaries of 10,000 workers on a minimum wage for forty years.<sup>86</sup> Foreign scholar Jeffrey Herbst, who has also analysed Nigeria's problem from the same perspective, came to the conclusion that 'Nigeria's problems actually stem from the peculiarly corrupt political economy, combined with an unfortunately generous oil reserve'.<sup>87</sup> In his study of the brief period between 1990 and 1991, when the Gulf crisis brought about a sharp rise in the price of oil, he discovered that the \$14 billion estimated by the World Bank to have accrued to Nigeria in 1990 alone had been misappropriated by the Babangida (1985-93) administration.<sup>88</sup> While the minor insights offered above remain a mere peep into the consequences of corruption for political stability, this line of analysis offers a convincing explanation for the reasons behind the obvious problem of discrimination in the sharing of the national revenue and in the allocation of social infrastructures. Understanding that unchecked corruption may cause the government to fail to satisfy the fundamental needs of the people, Ogho Alubo, a revisionist, maintains that the unfolding events linked with the Ogoni



struggle provide an opportunity to engage in a struggle against the economic and political imperialism imposed on the masses by the ruling group.<sup>89</sup>

Over the past twenty-five years in Nigeria, the evidence of an unfair distribution of the national revenue has been so glaring that scholars unanimously agree on this fact, their position on national unity notwithstanding. Omotunde, an opponent of secession, agreed after an extensive tour of 'oil areas' in 1985 that oil-producing villages, the geese that lay the golden eggs, are among the most wretched and poverty-stricken in the country – a situation he described as the most 'paradoxical phenomenon of modern Nigeria'.<sup>90</sup> It would appear that both the government and the oil concerns involved are interested only in drilling oil from these areas, and care little about the basic needs of the citizens. When Mofat Ekoriko took up the question, both the government and its oil partners agreed that indeed the communities had not been fairly treated.<sup>91</sup> As Paul Ogbo-man pointed out, until the government meets its moral obligation, there will be continued conflict.<sup>92</sup> Achebe has warned that, for social discontent to be minimized, there is an urgent need to control widespread corruption. Until then, he believes, individual and group resentment will persist.<sup>93</sup>

## Minority Rights and Autonomy

Issues in political science discourse in Nigerian secessionist movements centre on the familiar problems of regional domination, xenophobia, minority rights, autonomy for all groups and military authoritarianism, among others. Careful observation reveals that fear of domination in Nigerian politics has changed in content from the fear of foreign subordination to that of inter-group domination. The scope has also changed, from a suspicion of southern domination of the north to a suspicion of majority domination of the minority.<sup>94</sup> It has equally shifted from Igbo – and later Hausa-Fulani – domination of other ethnic groups<sup>95</sup> to the northern domination of the south, with the military as the tangible instrument of this domination.

Scientists have given these movements different interpretations in the context of political instability and the trend to construct ethnic identities in Nigeria. In his critique of the structures in the Nigerian federal system, Okwudiba Nnoli views the problem from the angle of the human factor in ethnic politics. In his study of political trends from independence in 1960 to the collapse of the second republic in 1983, he illustrates how socio-economic advantages, which are secured for individuals and groups through political power, have brought about the politicization of ethnicity in the country and, in so doing, have fostered separatist tendencies. He blames the political élite for translating inter-class and inter-individual socio-economic competition into competition

among communal unions – within which party politics were found to be causing acrimony.<sup>96</sup>

The available evidence shows that, more often than not, political leaders who fail to secure expected electoral victories resort to making appeals to ethnic or ideological sentiments, which in turn arouse separatist feelings. Achebe lends credit to Nnoli's view with the observation that tribalism in Nigeria's political history denies it national integration. He cites an instance when a popular Yoruba politician called the country 'a mere geographical expression', with an appeal to the Yorubas not to vote for his opponents – who were non-Yorubas – during the 1956 western region premiership election.<sup>97</sup> On this evidence, Achebe concludes that the tendency to retreat into one's ethnic community in order to check rival opponents from other parts of the country continues to frustrate national unity.

Some revisionist scholars make a case for human rights and minority rights. According to Eghosa Osaghae, who has made a case-study of human rights and ethnic-conflict management in Nigeria, the balancing of individual rights and group rights is paramount for socio-political harmony.<sup>98</sup> As he noted, although ethnic conflicts are seen in terms of conflicts among ethnic groups, they rarely occur in purely ethnic forms. Rather, they involve conflicts on the individual and intra-group levels – with reinforcement coming through the mobilization of cleavages based on class, religion, race and regionalism.<sup>99</sup> In Nigeria, the human-rights approach to conflict management (as analysed by Osaghae) gained prominence when the bill of rights was enshrined in the independent constitution of 1960, and subsequent ones. This bill covered civil and political rights – the right to life, personal liberty, a fair hearing, freedom of thought and religion, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, among others – mainly on the individual level. As a flaw, Osaghae notes that there were no clear constitutional provisions aimed at protecting the weaker and disadvantaged groups in Nigeria.<sup>100</sup> As he sums up with regard to the Ogoni struggle, [group] 'grievances can not be resolved by individual rights alone. Specific group rights, by whatever name they might be called – privileges, special treatment, minority protection, etc. – are called for'<sup>101</sup> in order to achieve stability in an ethnically divided society like Nigeria.

In agreement with Osaghae's individual/group rights solution for managing inter-group conflicts, Dukor, in a broad definition of the term, has remarked that these rights include those of the smaller ethnic groups in the federation and also of confessional minorities in both the northern and southern parts of the country. In an analysis of the majority/minority relationship as it affected the Ogoni struggle, he underlines the importance of fostering national cohesion through positive, concrete measures that should be implemented to remove the feeling of marginalization among smaller groups in the country.<sup>102</sup> Making a case for the institution of a genuinely democratic polity in Nigeria, he stresses

that by sharing political power with minorities – especially in Nigeria, where the aggregate number of minorities will form a majority – a framework for peace can be created through democratic integration and pluralism. He argues that the binary system of majority and minority groups would tend to disappear in such a polity.<sup>103</sup> As Osaghae further elaborates, while civil and political rights are sought to protect an individual's liberties and to preserve their human dignity in their relations with others and the state, groups' rights are sought to enhance human well-being on the basis of equality and justice.

In addition, group rights are necessary to protect and further the collective interests of members of the group.<sup>104</sup> Both kinds of rights, in his opinion, are therefore equally important for sustaining national unity in Nigeria. This view hinges on the fact that when latent individual-based conflicts – defined by Osaghae as 'hidden ethnic conflicts', which generally manifest themselves in the usual competition for public-service appointments, admission to educational institutions, trade, etc., among people from different ethnic groups – are not properly managed, they erupt into major conflicts.<sup>105</sup>

Nobel Laureate – and consistent revisionist – Wole Soyinka, in a scholarly analysis of 'the national question in Africa', has considered the debate on separatism from the perspective of the dictatorial regimes and their attendant crisis of legitimacy.<sup>106</sup> An unwavering opponent of military dictatorships in Africa, Soyinka, in a case-study of Nigeria, comes to the conclusion that 'repression strengthens ethnic identity and encourages separatism'.<sup>107</sup> Citing the Ogoni case, he argues that the tragic genocidal onslaught perpetrated by the vicious military dictatorship of Gen. Abacha provoked resentment (even from unexpected quarters) which 'increasingly [tested] the assumptions of nation-being – whether as an ideal, a national bonding, a provider, a haven of security and order, or as an enterprise of productive co-existence'.<sup>108</sup> As he underlines, a nation should share a perception of a community whose fundamental existence is rooted in ideas shared by all human beings. Under a dictatorship, says Soyinka, there is no nation. All that remains is 'a fiefdom, a planet of slaves, regimented by aliens. This marks the period of retreat into cultural identities' – a process he sees as logical, because then 'the essence of nationhood has gone underground'.<sup>109</sup> In this context, he argues that the longer the dictatorship lasts, the more tenacious the hold of that cultural nationalism becomes, attracting to itself all the allegiances, social relevance and visceral identification that should belong to the larger nation.<sup>110</sup> He concludes that a society can talk in terms of nationhood only when the cause of democracy and legitimacy has been espoused, alongside the eradication of military governments. The introduction of a provision allowing for freedom of thought, association and belief, and prohibiting discrimination in social rights, would then foster legitimacy and national unity.<sup>111</sup>

Exploring the ethnic minority question and pushing the quest for autonomy further, Marxist scholar Eddie Madunagu, in a revisionist's critique of existing explanations, has offered a socialist perspective on the national question. In this critique, attention is called to the irreversible historical transformations that have undermined micro-autonomies, not only in Nigeria, but also globally. On this premise, therefore, Madunagu maintains that any formulation of the minority question that ignores its historical character, or merely cites the past autonomy of an ethnic group or community as sufficient grounds for demanding an autonomous state within the Nigerian federation, is unacceptable.<sup>112</sup> Criticizing the policy of state creation in Nigeria – a policy that aims to enhance the federal system through the creation of autonomous units – he argues that, by making available more political, administrative and bureaucratic posts, the polity is only separating the poor from the rich. In this way, he says, a new section of the national bourgeoisie is constituted and given a new home base. The common people remain powerless. By implication, he argues that Nigeria is premised on the false assumption that the most significant divisions between people are ethnic and religious. In reality, as he perceives it, the key problem lies in socio-economic divisions – which divide social classes into rich and poor, in both majority and minority ethnic groups – which means that the root of the social instability in the country is in fact inequality. In his opinion, therefore, side by side with ethnic differences there should be recognition of the existence of rich-poor, exploiter-exploited, oppressor-oppressed dichotomies – a situation he sees as the main source of individual and group discontent. In his view, those who dominate the economic, social and political life of the country – a tiny minority drawn from all the ethnic groups – hold the key to broadening understanding of the ethnic minority question.<sup>113</sup> Summing up, Madunagu asserts that the problem cannot be tackled properly until the principle is laid down that all Nigerians – and not just all the leaders or ethnic groups – are equally entitled to the opportunities available in their country. This, he reasons, will put an end to the autonomy question and its threat to the unity and stability of Nigeria, which will then enter its true historical state in which 'the free development of the individual is the condition for the free development of the country'.<sup>114</sup>

## Conclusion

In the course of this chapter, the trends in discourses on secession and alternatives to it were contextually presented as a spectre of endless debates among students of Nigerian politics. The various institutional settings for these discourses have been identified as seminars and symposiums, as well as forums constituted on the initiative of cultural associations, pro-democracy activists and other kinds

of civil-society networks. Aside from the debates taking place within these settings, scholarly publications by intellectuals both inside and outside Nigeria provide the most comprehensive body of study materials.

Nigerian discourse on secession has been undergoing a rapid revision as it passes from an older generation, engaged in issues dividing the different interest groups in the country, into the hands of a more professional generation of intellectuals who are trying to offer an explanation of the national question (and who are also politically engaged, although in a different way). In general, incidents of separatism in Africa illustrate the problems inherent in nation-building in modern African states. Regarding Nigeria, scholars have considered social injustice, economic redistribution and the political economy of corruption, they have examined ethnicity, assessed individual and group rights infringements, questioned military dictatorships and illegitimate governments, focused on regime failures and reviewed the agonies of democracy. They have also investigated class inequalities, historical antecedents and leadership.<sup>115</sup> Judged by its content and the manner in which issues are presented, the debate reveals the anxieties felt by a state in search of a common identity, which continues to elude it. For most scholars of the revisionist order, the problem with Nigeria is a product of internal factors to do with social injustice brought about by the domination of one group or part of the country by another.<sup>116</sup> Whether the actual cause of ethnic nationalism in Africa is the internal factor of sectional domination or the external factor of colonialism, the truth is indeed, as King Solomon said, that 'man has dominated [his fellow] man to his injury'.<sup>117</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, 'National History in the Context of Decolonization. The Nigerian Example', in Erik Lonnroth, Karl Molin and Ragnar Bjork (eds), *Conceptions of National History*, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1994, pp. 64-78. The northern and southern parts of Nigeria were joined together by the British in 1914 for administrative convenience, as at that time the north was unable to generate enough funds to cover the overhead costs of separate colonial administration.
- <sup>2</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli, in his book *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu-Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978, pp. 170-171, comments that political gains (electoral advantages), rather than principle, lay behind majority support for minority demands.
- <sup>3</sup> The North took advantage of its majority in the Federal House of Representatives to defeat the motion, and asked for the reference to 1956 – in the request for Nigerian independence – to be replaced with the phrase 'as soon as possible'. See Walter Schwarz, *Nigeria*, London, Pall Mall, 1968, p. 106.
- <sup>4</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa, in an interview entitled 'Secession – will the Ogonis go?', *The News* Lagos, 17 May 1993, p. 24, described the rebellion led by Isaac Boro as irrational and without a clear objective.

- <sup>5</sup> Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 229; Frederick Forsyth, *Emeka*, Ibadan-Nigeria, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1982, pp. 90-91.
- <sup>6</sup> G. I. C. Eluwa, M. O. Ukagwu, J. U. N. Nwachukwu, and A. C. N. Nwaubani, *A History of Nigeria*, Onitsha, Nigeria, Africana-Fep Publishers, 1988, p. 261.
- <sup>7</sup> Claude S. Phillips, 'Nigeria and Biafra', in Frederick L. Shiels (ed.), *Ethnic Separatism and World Politics*, Lanham, Md., University Press of America, 1984, p. 166. This writer remarks that with the Igbo predominance in the coup and the biased nature of the killings, ethnic factors immediately came to the fore.
- <sup>8</sup> Northerners' fears were understandable. The country had just emerged from colonial rule, and having another form of colonialism would not have been acceptable to them. See Schwarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.
- <sup>9</sup> The targets of the second round of killings were not only the Igbos, but also other groups from the east, including the Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio, Ogoja and so on. In the beginning, this fact was to help rally easterners to the secessionist movement that led to the birth of Biafra. See Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
- <sup>10</sup> Eluwa *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-267, indicate that when the non-easterners were asked to leave the eastern region, there was increasing hostility in the region in response to the northern massacres. See also Schwarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-231.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- <sup>12</sup> Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-93.
- <sup>13</sup> Elechi Amadi and Opubo E. Dominabo, 'The Nigerian Civil War', in E. J. Alagoa and Tellena N. Tamuno (eds), *Law and People of Nigeria*, Port Harcourt, Riverside Communication, 1989, p. 154. See also Eluwa *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-267.
- <sup>14</sup> Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
- <sup>15</sup> Often, the question is asked why the secessionists adopted the name Biafra. What may be said for sure is that the name came from the 'Bights of Benin and Biafra', a geographical location around the offshore waters southeast of the Nigerian border with the Republic of Cameroon. This strategic outlet from the east held great importance for Biafra's communication with the outside world. When the channel was closed following a deal between Nigeria and Cameroon, the collapse of the seceding territory became only a matter of time, as arms and relief materials were refused entry into the Republic of Biafra by water. There is also speculation that there once existed a kingdom called Biafra, in the seventeenth century, around present-day Cameroon.
- <sup>16</sup> Schwarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-230.
- <sup>17</sup> The African countries that recognized Biafra as an independent sovereign state were Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Zambia.
- <sup>18</sup> Peter Lewis, 'Endgame in Nigeria? The Politics of a Failed Democratic Transition', *African Affairs*, Vol. 93, 1994, pp. 323-346. See also Gilbert Khadiagala, 'The Military in Africa's Transitions: Regional Dimensions', *Africa Today*, Vol. 42, 1995, pp. 61-74; and Claude E. Welch Jr, 'Civil Military Agonies in Nigeria, Pains of an Unaccomplished Transition', *Armed Forces and Society*, summer 1995, pp. 593-614.
- <sup>19</sup> See Mahmud Sakah, 'The Failed Transition to Civil Rule in Nigeria: Its Implication for Democracy and Human Rights', *Africa Today*, Vol. 40, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarterly, 1993, p. 88.
- <sup>20</sup> Ima Niboro, 'Abacha's Revenge', *Tell*, No. 46, 13 Nov. 1995, pp. 10-16.
- <sup>21</sup> Steve Crayford, 'The Ogoni Uprising: Oil, Human Rights, and a Democratic Alternative in Nigeria', *Africa Today*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1996, pp. 183-189.
- <sup>22</sup> Wole Soyinka, 'The National Question in Africa: Internal Imperatives', *Development and Change*, Vol. 27, 1996, pp. 279-300.

### *Intellectuals and Separist Movements in Nigeria*

- <sup>23</sup> I have used the word 'volcanic' to qualify the incidents of violence in the Niger Delta because of the off-and-on cases of riots and protests, by youths and different interest groups, against both the Nigerian government and the oil companies in the various oil-producing communities in the delta region.
- <sup>24</sup> The federal government confiscated all Igbo-owned landed property located outside Igbo territory, as a kind of punishment for supporting secession. Millions of Igbos living in different regions were forced to return home following the ethnic killings in the north and west, which also affected other easterners.
- <sup>25</sup> In a metaphorical speech by the Nigerian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in 1960, in a reference to Africa's anti-colonial protests, it was said, 'once nationalism is born, you cannot defeat it'. Ironically, this statement is now crucially relevant to ethnic conflicts and secessionist attempts in Nigeria itself. See *General Assembly Official Records*, 10 October 1961, Eighteenth Session, 1031<sup>st</sup> Plenary Meeting, A/PV, 1031.
- <sup>26</sup> The ASUU was established primarily as a labour movement for the protection of the interests of Nigerian academics from various universities. On many occasions, the ASUU has come in direct collision with military dictators in Nigeria, prompting frequent clampdowns by government.
- <sup>27</sup> Adonis Hoffman, 'Nigeria: The Policy Conundrum', *Foreign Policy*, 1995, p. 148.
- <sup>28</sup> Victor Ogene and Suleiman Anyalewechi, 'Nigeria: The Oduduwa Invocation', *The Source*, Vol. 3, No. 20, 24 August 1998, p. 9.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>30</sup> Okey Nwachukwu, 'Sunset Biafra. Can Another Igbo Republic Stand?', *The Source*, Vol. 3, No. 20, 24 August 1998, p. 15.
- <sup>31</sup> Reno Williams, 'Old Brigades, Money Bags, New Breeds, and the Ironies of Reform in Nigeria', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 27, 1993, pp. 78-79.
- <sup>32</sup> In many such moves, social scientists, working with the army and politicians, produced Nigeria's first independent constitution, subsequent ones such as those of 1979 and 1987, and the 1995 constitution on which the fourth republic was to be founded.
- <sup>33</sup> Tam David-West, 'The Intellectuals', in *ibid.*, *Philosophical Essays*, Ibadan, Nigeria, Ibadan University Press, 1980, p. 98.
- <sup>34</sup> Yusuf Bangura, 'Intellectuals, Economic Reforms and Social Change: Constraints and Opportunities in the Formation of a Nigerian Technocracy', *Development and Change*, Vol. 25, 1994, pp. 266-267.
- <sup>35</sup> E.A. Ayandele, *The Educated Élite in Nigerian Society*, Ibadan, Nigeria, Ibadan University Press, 1974.
- <sup>36</sup> Dennis Osadebe, *Building a Nation*, Lagos, Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1978, pp. 187-201.
- <sup>37</sup> Emeka Ojukwu, *The Ahiara Declaration. The Principles of the Biafran Revolution*, Markpress, Geneva, 1969. In this document, the reasons for the struggle, its philosophy, scope and overall aims were articulated in order to demonstrate that it was justified.
- <sup>38</sup> Ali Marui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, London, Heinemann, 1975. Christopher Okigbo was a university don and an accomplished poet, widely tipped to be the first African Nobel Laureate for literature. During the civil war, he took to the battlefield out of frustration that Biafra was losing. Unfortunately, he did not survive the struggle.
- <sup>39</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Enugu, Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1983, pp. 5-7 and 11-17.
- <sup>40</sup> Nelson Ota, *The Trial of Biafra's Leaders*, Enugu, Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980, p. vii.

- <sup>41</sup> Nnamdi B. Azikiwe, cited in Anthony H. M. Kirk-Green, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: a Documentary Source Book 1966-1969*, London, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 421.
- <sup>42</sup> Nnamdi B. Azikiwe, *Origins of the Nigerian Civil War*, Apapa, Nigeria, The Nigerian National Press, 1969, p. 16.
- <sup>43</sup> Kingsley O. Mbadiwe, *Rebirth of a Nation*, Enugu, Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, 1991, p. 203.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- <sup>45</sup> Horatio Agedah, 'Why the Federal Forces Will Win the War Against the Rebels', in *Towards One Nigeria*, No. 4, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, 1968, p. 15.
- <sup>46</sup> Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 91
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.
- <sup>48</sup> N. U. Akpan, *The Struggle for Secession, 1966-1970*, London, Frank Cass, 1971, p. xiii.
- <sup>49</sup> Allen Buchanan, *The Morality of Political Divorce: From Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1991, p. 65.
- <sup>50</sup> Ojukwu, *op. cit.*, p. 22
- <sup>51</sup> Donald Horowitz, at a presentation for doctoral students at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 28 January 1998. See also his *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, California University Press, 1985.
- <sup>52</sup> John De St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1972; Rex Niven, *The War of Nigerian Unity 1967-1970*, London, Evans, 1960; and Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 215. All three authors point out the provocative character of the Igbos residing in the Northern region in the period before the civil crisis, which must have added extra bitterness to northerners' grievances.
- <sup>53</sup> Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
- <sup>54</sup> Billy J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Nigeria, University of Ibadan Press, 1973, p. 132.
- <sup>55</sup> It is important to note that Kenule Saro-Wiwa was not originally the architect of the Ogoni movement. He only took over the leadership around 1991-92 and gave it a confrontational flavour.
- <sup>56</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt, Saros International Publishers, 1992, p. 103.
- <sup>57</sup> Adeleke, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.
- <sup>58</sup> Claude Welch Jr, 'The Ogoni and Self-Determination: Increasing Violence in Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1995, pp. 635-639.
- <sup>59</sup> Crayford, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-189; Welch Jr, 'The Ogoni and Self-determination: Increasing Violence in Nigeria', 1995, pp. 635-649.
- <sup>60</sup> See Saro-Wiwa's interview with *The News*: 'Secession. Will the Ogonis go?' p. 24.
- <sup>61</sup> Ben Naamen, 'Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy by Ken Saro-Wiwa', Review Article in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 32, 1994, pp. 538-539.
- <sup>62</sup> Yusuf Bala Usman, quoted in Muiyiwa Adeleke, 'The Shooting Field: Soldiers Shoot Eleven Ogoni Marchers Protesting Ecological Ravage', *The News*, 17 May 1993, p. 21.
- <sup>63</sup> Saro-Wiwa, *Newswatch*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-21.
- <sup>64</sup> Cervenke Zdernek, *The Unfinished Quest for Unity: Africa and the OAU*, New York, African Publishing Company, 1977, p. 229.
- <sup>65</sup> Anthony Enahoro, cited by Claude S. Philips, 'Nigeria and Biafra', in Shiels (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.
- <sup>66</sup> Ojukwu, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.



## *Intellectuals and Separist Movements in Nigeria*

- <sup>67</sup> These were dangerous ideas which almost damaged the support enjoyed by Nigeria at the OAU. See *ibid.*, pp. 19-20. The federal government's management of the changing content of the crisis was commendable.
- <sup>68</sup> Anthony Enahoro, as a federal government delegate, in a statement at the OAU conference held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in 1969. See Evelyn Jones Rich and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa, Tradition and Change*, New York, Random House, 1972, p. 375.
- <sup>69</sup> Tam David-West, 'Social Justice: Its Meaning and Implication?' in *ibid.*, *Philosophical Essays*, Ibadan, Nigeria, Ibadan University Press, 1980, pp. 170-176.
- <sup>70</sup> Achebe, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>73</sup> Dele Omotunde *et al.*, 'Paradox of Oil Areas', *Newswatch*, 13 Dec. 1985, p. 13.
- <sup>74</sup> Sam Olukoya, 'Why they Seethe', *Newswatch*, 3 Dec. 1995, pp. 10-14.
- <sup>75</sup> Maduabuchi Dukor, 'The Sovereign and the Minority', *Champion*, 16 April 1996, p. 4.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>77</sup> Achebe, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-63. Benneth Ade Odunsi, who carried out a study on the impact of leadership instability and democratic process in Nigeria in the period from 1960 to 1995, shares Achebe's views. According to the findings of this study, the pervasive political wrangling, civil strife, economic disorder and social malaise endemic in Nigeria today flow in part from ineffective leadership – a common problem among African states. The dilemma, he concluded, is how to find a unifier – a patriotic, enlightened and visionary leader. Benneth Ade Odunsi, 'The Impact of Leadership Instability on Democratic Process in Nigeria', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 31, Nos 1-2, 1996, pp. 66-81.
- <sup>79</sup> Buchanan noted that, before the civil war, Biafra constituted 22% of the Nigerian population. In terms of national revenue, the region contributed 38% of the total, and received 14% from the government. At this period, oil exporting was still more or less at the prospective stage. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
- <sup>80</sup> Ekumopere Richard Asanebi, in a letter to *Newswatch*, 18 December 1995, p. 4, stated that by 1992 the Ogoni represented 0.56% of the total population, and contributed approximately 4% of federal government earnings.
- <sup>81</sup> Evelyn Jones Rich and Immanuel Wallerstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 373-374.
- <sup>82</sup> Ojukwu, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22.
- <sup>83</sup> Saro-Wiwa, *Newswatch*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- <sup>84</sup> Saro-Wiwa, 'They are Killing my People', *The News*, Lagos, 17 May 1993, pp. 23-27.
- <sup>85</sup> Achebe, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>87</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, 'Is Nigeria a Viable State?', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1996, pp. 151-172. Quotation p. 156.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.
- <sup>89</sup> Ogoh Alubo, 'The Besieged Country', *Newswatch*, 18 December 1995, Vol. 22, No. 25, p. 6.
- <sup>90</sup> Omotunde, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>91</sup> Moffat Ekoriko, 'Whose Duty is it?', *Newswatch*, 23 December 1985, pp. 12-14.
- <sup>92</sup> Paul Ogboman, cited in Moffat Ekoriko, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- <sup>93</sup> Achebe, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>94</sup> In 'A Historical Analysis of Voter Behaviour in Nigeria, 1960-97', a paper delivered at the *Political Science Seminar*, A.I.C.E. Owerri-Nigeria, Summer 1998, pp. 1-13, Innocent Uzoechi

reports on his discovery that regional minorities often vote for parties other than the one dominated by their respective regional majorities.

- <sup>95</sup> Saro-Wiwa, commenting on why he failed to support Biafra, stated that the Igbo-led rebellion did not guarantee independence for eastern minorities. He said that [Ojukwu] 'was trying to steal a country – to take the rest of us'. Ken Saro Wiwa, 'They are Killing my People', *op. cit.* In other words, the minorities were suspicious of Igbo political designs during eastern secession. Consequently, they denounced secession as soon as the eastern region was split into three sub-states.
- <sup>96</sup> Nnoli, *op. cit.*
- <sup>97</sup> Achebe, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- <sup>98</sup> Eghosa E. Osaghae, 'Human Rights and Ethnic Conflict Management: The Case of Nigeria', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 1966, pp. 171-188.
- <sup>99</sup> Osaghae, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- <sup>102</sup> Dukor, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- <sup>104</sup> Osaghae, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- <sup>106</sup> Soyinka, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-300.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.
- <sup>112</sup> Eddie Madunagu, *Problems of Socialism: The Nigerian Challenge*, London, Zed Press, 1982, p. 42.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- <sup>115</sup> Uzoechi, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>116</sup> Achebe, *op. cit.*, 1983, pp. 1-22. Suberu, 'The Travail of Federalism in Nigeria', in Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner (eds), *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1994, pp. 56-70.
- <sup>117</sup> Ecclesiastes, 8:9.