Ethnic Propaganda, Hate Speech, and Mass Violence in Igbo-Hausa/ Fulani Relations in Postcolonial Nigeria

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Abstract

Opinions are divided on the conduct and nature of the 1967–70 Nigerian civil war, occasioned partly by the Igbo secession and declaration of the Republic of Biafra. Some believe that the Nigerian government adopted a genocidal war strategy characterised by mass violence against civilians, aggressive blockade of the eastern region, artificial famine, and hateful/threatening utterances by many military commanders, accompanied by about one million civilian casualties. On the other hand, some are of the view that the actions of some Nigerian military officers and men were not in consonant with the position of the Nigerian government during the war, but were influenced by their animosity towards the Igbo. In post-civil war Nigeria, Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations and political discourses are increasingly tense and indicative of a fearful resurgence of mass violence due to prevalent lies, propaganda, and misrepresentations –verbally, on paper, and online/on social media – particularly among the youths on both sides. This paper argues that the historical crisis-ridden relations between the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani, the attendant 1966 mass killings of Igbos in the north, the nature of the war strategies of the federal government during the civil war, and the currently mounting tension are all direct results of contending ethnic propaganda including hate speech, lies, and name-calling in a bid to gain political and strategic advantages over other ethnic groups. Thus, this paper is a historical inquiry into the role of propaganda and hate speech in socio-political interactions, discourses, and incitements of mass violence among the heterogeneous Nigerian population, particularly the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani. The paper proposes legislative, constitutional, and active citizenship advocacies to address the menace. The article utilises primary and secondary sources to analyse and interpret the subject-matter of the paper.

Introduction and Historical Background

Nigeria is a heterogeneous nation of over 250 ethnic nationalities. The dominant ethnic groups consist of the Igbo, the Hausa/Fulani, and the Yoruba. The Igbo, the Yoruba, and other minor ethnic groups (Efik, Ibibio, Edo, Ijo) who dominate the southern part of the country are predominantly Christian. On the other hand, the Hausa/Fulani – along with other ethnic groups (Tiv, Jukun, Kanem, Igala) – occupy the northern part of the country and are predominantly Muslim. The different ethnic nationalities that made up the federation were independent states before they were conquered and incorporated into the British colonial empire. In 1914 they were amalgamated, ushering the birth of the Nigerian state under British colonial rule. During the era of colonial rule, the British colonial masters orchestrated divide and rule colonial policies that divided the northern and southern parts of the country. The era of decolonisation saw regional politics and other sectional divisive tendencies that polarised the ranks of the three main ethnic groups alongside the minorities. The lack of unity and a weak sense of nationhood marked and undermined Nigerian nationalism and the independence struggle so much that, barely three years preceding independence in 1960, the Hausa/Fulani-dominated north declared that the region was not ready for independence, as against the aspiration of the south, which was vigorously pushing for total freedom and Nigerian statehood. It is imperative to note that the Nigerian state was built on a fragile foundation, which made it susceptible to ethnic and regional tensions, schisms, conflicts, and instability right from its infancy. Existing conflict studies literature on Nigeria have extensively explored the Nigerian military coup d'états, the civil War, the insurgency, and inter-communal conflicts from political, economic, and ethnic/tribal perspectives (Kirk-Greene, 1967; Oyeweso, 1992; Adeyeri, 2015), but the specific role of ethnic propaganda and hate speech in violent conflicts in the country is yet to be adequately studied and fully revealed. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper is to investigate the trajectory and role of ethnic propaganda and hate speech in Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations and mass violence during the postcolonial era. The study shall also consider corrective policy and other response measures.

Conceptual Clarification: Ethnic Propaganda and Hate speech

Ethnicity over the years has attracted considerable attention in academia, government cycles, and the public domain – as it has been manipulated by some groups of people to inflict pain, misery, and death on others they conceive as different from them in terms of language, religion, culture, and worldview. Adlparvar and Tadros write that:

> 'Ethnicity is a hotly disputed concept. Since it emerged as an important form of collective identity in the 1960s, it has been appropriated by all kinds of people for all kinds of purposes. From political mobilisation that uses the necessity of ethnic homogeneity as the basis for expelling populations of different racial backgrounds to the conflation of ethnicity with religion (as when people assume Muslims are an ethnic category), and the reduction of complex geostrategic and historic conflicts to 'ethnic strife'' (2016: 123).

Ethnicity, according to Gurr (2009), has to do partly with the primordial interpretation of issues that recognise the differences among humankind and societies based on their race, language, customs, norms, and civilisation. One of the ways some groups of people or ethnic groups have promoted ethnicity negatively is through ethnic propaganda. This is the deliberate act of one ethnic group inciting its people against another ethnic group through the media and other platforms to inflict pain, assault, and – in some cases – mass violence and death (Deng, 1997). History is replete with examples of states and leaders who deployed ethnic propaganda – such as Nazi Germany against the Jews, and several others in other parts of the world. In Africa, there is ample evidence of ethnic propaganda between rival ethnic groups and the resultant consequences in the outbreaks of mass violence and conflicts in the Great Lakes and the Mano River regions, East and Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, as well as in West Africa and other parts of the continent (Aluede, 2019; Wimmer, 2004). In Nigeria, during the civil war, ethnic propaganda played a major role in inciting some ethnic groups against others. For instance, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani relations were heightened negatively through ethnic

propaganda and this influenced the attitudes of some of the combatants and senior military officers during the war to pursue the annihilation of the Igbo. The rivalry between both ethnic groups can be traced back to the colonial period and worsened during the failed January 15 1966 coup (Amadi, 2020). The coup plotters were dominated by Igbo military officers, while the victims of the coup were prominent Hausa/Fulani military officers and civilians, including the Prime Minister of the country, Sir Tafawa Balewa (Amechi, 2016). The Hausa/Fulani civilians, military officers, and soldiers took revenge through a counter-coup on July 15 1966. The victims of the coup were the Igbo civilians, military officers, and soldiers – including the Head of State, General Aguiyi Ironsi, as well as Igbo civilians massacred in northern Nigeria (Ojo and Fagbohun, 2014). Since the end of the civil war, Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations have been underlined by mutual suspicion maintained through subtle ethnic propaganda against one another.

Hate speech, like ethnic propaganda, has equally received attention among academia, government cycles, and the public domain. This is because of the magnitude of the negative consequences that have emanated from hate speech globally. The phenomenon of hate speech dates back centuries but has become a major issue of discourse in recent times due to its scope, conceptual meaning, and definition. The literature on hate speech agrees that it is morally wrong, harmful, and dehumanising to its victims (Brown, 2017; Noorani, 1992). This is because hate speech has generated a negative impact on society and has been exploited by individuals and groups sometimes driven by ethnic and religious sentiments to incite or provoke disunity and disaffection among rival individuals, groups, associations, and ethnic groups (Sorabjee, 1993). However, opinions are divided on what constitutes hate speech? Hate speech is a term in legal and political theory that refers to verbal conduct – and other symbolic, communicative action – which wilfully 'expresses intense antipathy towards a group or towards an individual based on membership group', where the groups in question are usually those distinguished by ethnicity, religion, or sex (Simpson, 2013). Seglow (2016) conceives hate speech as speech that attacks (and is intended to attack) its targets because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and so on, and which conveys intense feelings of apathy. Ezeibe (2015: 4) refers to hate speech as any speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action.

"hate speech manifests in various forms and is not limited to identity-prejudicial abuse and harassment, the use of slurs and epithets, some extremist political speech, and certain displays of 'hate symbols' (for example, swastikas or burning crosses) (Simpson, 2013: 702). Hate speech is an abuse of free speech or freedom of speech."

In other words, hate speech manifests in various forms and is not limited to identity-prejudicial abuse and harassment, the use of slurs and epithets, some extremist political speech, and certain displays of 'hate symbols' (for example, swastikas or burning crosses) (Simpson, 2013: 702). Hate speech is an abuse of free speech or freedom of speech. The negative manifestations of hate speech in different societies across the world have led to litigations as well as the ban or restrictions of comments that can incite violence, and punishment on those responsible for such comments (American Bar Association, 1994). This notwithstanding, however, some are of the view that punishing people based on comment or speech is an infringement on their constitutional rights. This development has continued to generate controversy among scholars based on their varied interpretations and conceptions of hate speech.

In Nigeria, it is believed that hate speech gained momentum during the colonial period among the various ethnic groups, particularly between the north and south, and spread into the fabric of the respective institutions that evolved during the period (Nzemeka, 2021). Similarly, it progressed among the rival political parties during the colonial period, and into the postcolonial era (Bukarti, 2017). Hate speech was at its ascendancy before, during, and after the Nigerian civil war, among the combatants from the

Nigerian side and the Biafra secessionists (Ahmad, 2017). Senior military officers from both camps made provocative hate speech comments against one another – such as 'killing anything in sight,' 'Kaffari', and 'infidel' – and this fuelled the bitterness between the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani (Osuntokun and Nwokike, 2002). Hate speech between the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani has been on the increase after the country's civil war, arising from the fall out that led to the Nigerian civil war, the perceived marginalisation of the Igbos, and other contentious issues in the Nigerian polity. Despite efforts by successive administrations to tackle the spread of hate speech in the political space, the tension between the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani has remained unresolved owing to bitter animosity, mistrust, and perceptions.

Hate Speech, Propaganda, and the Politics of the First Republic

Nigeria attained independence from British colonial rule on 1 October 1960, and entered the global arena as a country with rich potential and a leading voice in promoting African uniqueness to the world. However, domestic challenges arising from rivalry amongst the country's ethnic groups presented a major threat to Nigeria's unity and progress. Before independence was achieved, the political space was already polarised, as demonstrated in the factionalisation of the political parties along ethnic lines during the colonial period (Osuntokun and Nwokike, 2002). Likewise, each party's quest to dominate the others and to secure the highest political office in the land witnessed all manner of political strategies such as propaganda and hate speech. Interestingly, the political elites were at the forefront in promoting hate speech against their rival ethnic groups. This was one of the features of the politics of the First Republic. For instance, leading political figures – namely the premiers of the Northern and Western Regions and Nigeria's Governor General – were guilty of hate speech:

> 'The Igbo are too dominating, if you employ an Igbo man as a labourer, he will like to take over as foreman within a short while – Late Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The God of Africa has created the Igbo Nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages – Nigeria's first President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Nnamdi Azikiwe's policy was to corrode the self-respect of the Yoruba people as a group to build up the Igbo as master race – Chief Obafemi Awolowo.' (Ezeibe, 2015)

It is not surprising that ethnic rivalry and the quest for dominance by the three major ethnic groups fuelled hate speech and propaganda during the First Republic and contributed to its extinction in January 1966.

Reminiscence of Igbo-Hausa/Fulani Rivalry Before the Nigerian Civil War

Nigeria faced numerous challenges after the attainment of independence, namely: the 1962 census and Action Group (AG) crisis, the disputed 1963 census result, the 1964 election crisis, the 1965 western region crisis, the rising tide of corruption among politicians and senior military officers, the entrenchment of ethnicity within the political space, and the contestation for power among political elites (Aworawo, 2002). The postcolonial political elites were unable to find lasting solutions to these challenges that were partly a carry-over from colonial rule and a manifestation of a politics of bitterness displaced by the country's founding fathers in their quest to promote their ethnic group and political party above others. Some young military officers were driven by the desire to curb corruption and ethnic rivalry, and to chart the country onto the path of unity and nationhood – but their efforts were truncated by the political elites at independence (Oluwajuyitan, 2003; Oyeweso, 1992; Ladele, 1987). These young officers were led by Majors Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and were primarily from the southern part of the country. They were of Igbo extraction, except for Major Adewale Ademoyega, who is a Yoruba (Oyeweso, 1992). These young officers struck on 15 January 1966, in a bloody military coup d'état. In the course of carrying out their assignment, senior military officers from the northern region were killed, as were Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the northern region, and Sir Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's First Republic Prime Minister (Siollun, 2009).

Unfortunately, the coup failed and the military took power. The most senior officer at the time, Major General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Nigerian Army,

became the country's first military Head of State (Reviewcious, 2018). Major General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi was an Igbo man. The planning and execution of the January military coup were dominated by Igbo officers, coupled with General Aguyi-Ironsi's eventual seizure of power, and the casualties were mainly Hausa/Fulani officers and political leaders. This soon gave rise to the interpretation (at least in the north) that it was an Igbo coup primarily targeted at the northern power elite, or what soon became popularly known as 'Igbo Plot Theory', indicative of a grand agenda to entrench Igbo hegemony over the remaining ethnic nationalities within the fledgling Nigerian state. However, there is a need to point out that rather than a violent seizure of power with its attendant negative potential implications for civil governance and national unity and stability, the plotters ought to have allowed the citizenry to adopt the better option of changing the government through the constitutional method of elections. Also, given the deep ethnic divides and other centrifugal forces prevalent in the country during the colonial period – which gained ascendancy following the attainment of independence – coupled with the ethnic origin lop-sidedness of the coup planners, and the execution and casualties earlier analysed, it is difficult to dismiss the view that the coup was an Igbo tribal plot.

Following the nature by which the January coup was orchestrated and, more especially, the pattern by which the coup was executed, whereby the victims were of Hausa/Fulani extraction, it was only a matter of time before the north retaliated. The northern officers/soldiers retaliated on 29 July 1966 and their targets were the Igbos. Several Igbo military officers were killed as well as civilians in the north. Also, a victim of the July coup was the country's Head of State, Major-General Ironsi, who was on a state visit to the Western Region. He and his host Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi were killed by the coup plotters (Aworawo, 2002). Observers of Nigeria's political development, after the January coup, affirmed that apart from the killings of Hausa/Fulani in the first coup, the actions of Ironsi, particularly the nature of his appointment of people of his extraction and the outlawing of the Hausa language test which was a core requirement for employment in the northern Civil Service, provoked the retaliation of the north against the Igbos.

"The decree replaced the federal structure with a unitary system of government, thereby abolishing the pre-existing regional structure, and unified former regional public services, among other unitary provisions that were upheld by the military government. The decision of Ironsi to replace the unitary system of government with the federal system was vehemently opposed in the northern part of the country."

The promulgation of Decree 34 by the Ironsi-led military government worsened the already tense political atmosphere in the land. The decree replaced the federal structure with a unitary system of government, thereby abolishing the pre-existing regional structure, and unified former regional public services, among other unitary provisions that were upheld by the military government. The decision of Ironsi to replace the unitary system of government with the federal system was vehemently opposed in the northern part of the country. Amidst the chaos, the emirs (northern traditional rulers) openly threatened secession of the north from Nigeria unless the Unification Decree was nullified (Johnson, 1990). The development appeared to have confirmed northern suspicions and fears of Igbo domination, culminating in the July military coup led by northern soldiers against their Igbo colleagues in the military. Following the success of the July coup, there was jubilation in the northern part of the country. In the process, the jubilant crowd – with the battle cry araba ('let us part') – descended on the Igbos residing in the north, and several of them were killed (Meredith, 2005). Likewise, in the military cycle, many Igbo officers – including Lieutenant Colonels Gabriel Okonweze and Israel Okoro, Majors Christian Anuforo, Christopher Emelifonwu, Joseph Ihedigbo, Bernard Nnamani, Theophilus Nzegwu, Peter Obi, John Obienu, Donatus Okafor, Captains R. Agbazue, J. Chukwueke, L. Dilibe, I. Idika, H. Iloputaife, T. Iweanya, and many others including about 200 Non-

Commissioned Officers (NCOs) – were killed during the mutiny and violent change of government (Alao, 1990; Obiozor, 1994). Some Igbo civilians, including those fleeing, were not spared either. In Kano on 1 October 1966, mutinying northern soldiers mobilised local thugs to help them identify Igbo abodes, following which thousands of Igbos were murdered in places such as the airport and railway station.

The January and July military coups opened a new chapter in Nigeria's political history and, more especially, in Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations. They furthered entrenched divisions among ethnic groups and heightened the seeds of discord and animosity that have lasted up to the present day. Likewise, the development fuelled the use of unfriendly words against each other, regarded today as hate speech.

Following the killing of Ironsi, Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon was made Head of State through a consensus of some leading senior military officers. The choice of Gowon was rejected by Colonel Ojukwu, the Governor of the Eastern Region (Aworawo, 2002). He affirmed that Gowon was not the most senior officer to take over power following the death of Ironsi. Furthermore, following the killings of Igbos in the north, he pleaded with them to return home. Unfortunately, the failure of the top military hierarchy to resolve their differences, after several reconciliatory moves at home and abroad, culminated in the outbreak of thirty months of civil war between the Biafra secessionists (dominated by the Igbos) and the Nigerian state.

Hate Speech, Ethnic Propaganda, and Mass Violence: Igbo-Hausa/Fulani Relations During the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War

The inability of the political actors in the corridors of powers at the federal and regional levels, in particular in the eastern region, to settle their political differences led to the outbreak of the country's civil war. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the then-Head of State, Major-General Gowon, created 12 states from the four regions' federal structure (Amuwo, 1992). Following the development, the defunct Eastern Region administration and leaders of thought concluded that the interests of their people could no longer be advanced and ensured within the Nigerian state (Akpan, 1971; Lai, 2021). Therefore, under the leadership of Colonel Ojukwu, the former Eastern Region military Governor, the people of the region on 30 May 1967 declared their sovereign state, the Republic of Biafra, thereby dissolving all pre-existing political, economic, and other ties between them and the Nigerian federation. The jurisdiction of the new state covered the entire territory, the continental shelf, and the territorial waters of former south-eastern Nigeria (Kirk-Greene, 1967; Alao, 1990).

The war was marked by mass violence and atrocities against both combatants and civilians. As De St. Jorre (1972) has pointed out, both the federal and Biafran sides committed massacres during military confrontations and the immediate post-combat period. It is imperative to state that the federal military government was controlled by the Hausa/Fulani; likewise, the Nigerian armed forces that engaged the Biafra forces seeking separation from the Nigerian state. During the early period of the war, following Biafra's surprise invasion and capture of the Midwest region, Murtala's hurriedly established Second Division of the Nigerian Army massacred many Biafran prisoners of war (POWs), and Igbo civilians in their hundreds due to their sympathy for the Biafran soldiers, after expelling Biafran troops from the region. Some soldiers of the division also engaged in a looting spree, after the division's multiple failed amphibious attacks on Onitsha and resultant huge casualties. After the division eventually captured Onitsha via ground invasion, some federal troops looted occupied towns, harassed civilians' wives, and even committed armed robbery on an Asaba-based bank (Momoh, 2000).

Although existing evidence indicates that both sides deployed foreign mercenaries in their war efforts, the federal air force Egyptian mercenary fighter pilots were notorious for frequently attacking civilian targets, including many Red Cross shelters, instead of military targets. Also, federal forces launched attacks against Biafran hospitals and health personnel, and French doctors working as volunteers with the French Red Cross. It is worth noting that the international media focus on the worsening humanitarian disaster inside Biafra and the need for an appropriate response to such human tragedies was the basis for the eventual formation of the now globally well-known Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) (New World Encyclopedia, 2021; Bortolloti, 2004).

The aggressive land, naval, and air sieges on the Eastern Region by federal forces from the onset

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of the war caused deep human trauma and poor living conditions among civilian populations in the various towns and communities. Hate speech and threatening language by some members of the federal military leadership created worries that genocide against Biafra was in the offing. As an illustration, Colonel Benjamin Adekunle (a.k.a Black Scorpion), Commanding Officer of the Lagos Garrison Command-turned 3rd Marine Commandos, reportedly once declared that:

> We shoot at everything that moves and when our troops march into the center of Ibo territory, we shoot at everything even at things that do not move. (Amadi, 2007)

Even the strident criticisms and protests by humanitarian organisations in Europe and the United States of America (USA) did not make the federal side end the blockade (ADST, 1998; Adeoti, 2021). About 10,000 persons reportedly died daily from starvation caused by the blockade-inspired artificial famine due to disruption of agriculture and obstruction of food and other supplies distribution (Wiseberg, 1975). By the time the war ended, in January 1970, a total of over one million persons were estimated to have died from civilian hunger, malnutrition, and diseases (Shapiro, 2011).

Post-Civil War Hate Speech and Ethnic Propaganda in Igbo-Hausa/Fulani Relations

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For instance, the present Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federal, Abubakar Malami, was alleged to have posted the following comments concerning the Igbo on Twitter: ‘Igbos are stupid and unruly. They are the problem of this country’ (The Cable, 2011). In the same vein, renowned writer and poet Chinua Achebe made the following statement concerning the uniqueness of Igbos over other ethnic groups in Nigeria: ‘The Igbo culture, being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive, gave the Igbo man an unquestionable advantage… Unlike the Hausa/ Fulani, he was unhindered by a wary religion and unlike the Yoruba, he was unhampered by traditional hierarchies’ (2012: 74).

After the civil war, despite the policies of the Gowon-led military government to promote unity among the ethnic groups in Nigeria, events revealed that the opposite was the case concerning the Igbos. In 1971 and 1973 respectively, hundreds of Biafra ex-military, police, and prison officers were dismissed, including Ojukwu’s deputy during the war (Aworawo, 2002). Likewise, Igbos have been marginalised considerably

compared to other ethnic groups in Nigeria. For instance, the southeast is the only region with five states, whereas other regions have six states (Ezeibe, 2015). In the same vein, several administrations at the federal level, except for the civilian administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) and Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015), have been deprived of equitable political appointments. The southeast region has continually decried poor revenue allocation from the federal government, absence of infrastructural development in the region, and unjust census results that do not represent the population of the southeast (Nzemeka, 2021). The Igbos have suffered considerably from ethnic and religious conflicts in the north, since the return to democracy in 1999. Hundreds of Igbos were killed in different states of the north and their property destroyed. Many had to flee to their states (Olu-Adeyemi, 2018).

As part of a measure to defend itself from marginalisation and to promote its collective interest from the Nigerian government, Ralph Uwazuruike in 1999 formed the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) (Duruji, 2009). In 2015, when it appeared that MASSOB was losing steam, Nnamdi Kanu created the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to sustain the struggle for the creation of an independent Igbo State out of the current Nigerian federation. Pro-Biafra agitations have repeatedly pitched the Igbo against the Nigerian state and security agencies, and such conflicts have sometimes resulted in the killing of agitators.

Following MASSOB's re-declaration of Biafra in Aba, capital of Abia State on 22 May 2000, government security forces introduced repressive measures against the movement to checkmate it and its activities, which the government considered to be anti-state and illegitimate, leading to the death of many Biafra activists. Between May 2001 and February 2006, state security forces allegedly killed approximately 80 pro-Biafra agitators, arrested and arraigned 66, while more than 200 were arrested and subjected to human rights violations in the form of dehumanising and humiliating treatment. The worst form of state violence against MASSOB agitators occurred afterward in Onitsha during which up to 700 agitators were reportedly killed as a result of the state government's shoot-on-sight order (PARAN, 2006). Due to government crackdown and internal conflict within MASSOB, the group afterward went into decline, a vacuum that was filled by IPOB which intensified agitations for Biafra's statehood and separation from Nigeria. In this quest, IPOB and its supporters, like MASSOB, have come under government repression and violence (Ibeanu et al., 2016). Of particular note was the 12–15 September 2017 military siege on Kanu's (IPOB leader) home in Afara-Okwu, Umuahia, Abia State, with him, his parents, siblings, the elderly, and numerous visitors trapped inside and resulting in the death of about 28 persons and the injury and arrest of many others, as well as serious damage to the home, including gunshot damage to Kanu's bedroom. The IPOB leader's whereabouts became unknown since the military invasion. Significantly, this and similar acts of government violence and repression against IPOB prompted the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) to pronounce the federal government's branding of IPOB as a terrorist organisation and violence against its members a prima facie violation of the African Charter (Sahara Reporters, 2018; The Sun News Online, 2018; This Day Live, 2018).

Conclusion

Despite being fellow citizens and stakeholders of the Nigerian state, Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations in the postcolonial period have been marred by ethnic propaganda and hate speech by both sides, leading to phases of violent conflicts, widespread violations of human rights, and attendant mutual suspicion and hatred since the dawn of independence to the present. The Igbo-dominated military coup of January 1966 targeted and violently claimed the lives of the leading Hausa/Fulani political elite. A Hausa/Fulani retaliatory coup in July of the same year produced a much higher scale of violence and killing of Igbos, especially top military elite and middle-level officers. The pogrom launched by the Hausa/Fulani against Igbo residents in Northern Nigeria sustained the trend of mass violence and human rights infractions and triggered the forced displacement and emigration of huge Igbo populations back to their indigenous homeland in Eastern Nigeria. The 1967–70 Civil War marked the peak of violence-laden relations between the Igbo and Hausa/Fulani during the post-colonial period. The genocidal war strategy of the Hausa/Fulani-dominated Nigerian

government and military caused very high civilian casualties among the Igbo people. At present, Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations continue to be marked by ethnic propaganda, hate speech and pockets of violence due to the government's opposition to some Igbo groups' campaign for a sovereign State of Biafra. To halt this historical trend of violence-ridden relations and human rights violations, there is a need to consistently implement existing laws that prohibit ethnic or tribal hate speech and related activities that breed inter-ethnic grievances and are capable of instigating violent conflicts. There is also the need to appropriately strengthen these laws and introduce fresh legislations where necessary for more effectiveness. Finally, it is crucial for all stakeholders in the Nigerian project (government, politicians, bureaucrats, traditional rulers, and the entire citizenry) to observe and promote justice, fairness, equity, and fundamental human rights in their activities and relations with fellow Nigerians, regardless of ethnic or tribal affinities, religion, and other primordial considerations.

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