

## SIMILITUDES IN THE BIAFRAN AND AMBAZONIAN AGITATIONS, 1967–2022

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### Abstract

*Secessionist agitations have occurred in post-colonial Africa, often arising from the artificial boundaries imposed during the colonial era, which merged disparate ethnic groups into single political entities. Both Biafra (in Nigeria) and Ambazonia (in Cameroon) initiated unsuccessful bids for independence, driven by profound disillusionment among their indigenous populations. This disaffection was largely rooted in the pogroms experienced by Biafrans in northern Nigeria and the systematic political and socio-economic marginalisation of Ambazonians by the Cameroonian state. This study comparatively analyses these two movements, exploring their similarities, and examining how the responses of the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments have affected national integration efforts in both countries. Utilising data derived from secondary and tertiary materials, supplemented by the researcher's observations, the study reveals several key findings. In both cases, secessionist agitations were fundamentally linked to sustained political and economic marginalisation. A notable shared post-conflict strategy has been the adoption of "sit-at-home" protests as a major form of civil disobedience. Furthermore, the contiguous territories of both movements suffered extensive human and infrastructural losses as epicenters of their respective conflicts and share common ethnic groups across the Nigeria-Cameroon border. The study recommends that the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments should strengthen bilateral cooperation to manage separatist activities, implement more inclusive and participatory governance policies, and as a last resort, consider organising a referendum for these marginalised groups in question.*

**Keywords:** Biafra, Ambazonia, Agitations, Similarities, Marginalisation

### Introduction

Before the balkanisation of the African continent by the Europeans, there were societies, kingdoms and empires such as Monomotapa, Nubia, Egypt, Buganda, Ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Sokoto Caliphate. Others were those of the Igbo, Ijo, Ibibio, Efik among others. Colonisation of Africa made African kingdoms and empires lose their cherished independence. Ethnic groups that had nothing in common were lumped together during colonisation for the convenience of the colonialists. Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Italy and Germany colonised different parts of Africa. Lumping these ethnic groups together has considerably slowed down the process of nation building in Africa. The Ejagham, Boki and Chamba are some of the ethnic groups found both on the Cameroonian and Nigerian side of the border. The Yoruba are found in Nigeria and Benin and likewise the Ewe that are split between Togo and Ghana. The Azande were located in Sudan, Zaire and Central African Republic.<sup>1</sup> This was before the creation of South Sudan and the renaming of Zaire to Congo Democratic Republic. Today they are found in South Sudan, Congo Democratic Republic and Central African Republic. These ethnic groups are divided by artificial boundaries created by the Europeans. Some of these ethnic groups and others agitated to secede from the sovereign state. The Katanga region attempted to break away from Zaire in 1961. Eritrea successfully broke away from Ethiopia in 1993 while South Sudan became independent of Sudan in 2011. Successful secession scenarios were not only in Africa but also in other parts of the world. It happened in India, USSR and Yugoslavia. Pakistan seceded from India in 1947 while Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan in 1971. Fifteen countries emerged from the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1991, leaving only Russia. Some of them are Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Estonia among others. Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and 2006 broke into Slovenia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>2</sup> The seceded groups always quoted the right of self-determination as contained in Article 1, Paragraph 2 in Chapter 1 of the Charter of United Nations Organisation.

The Richards Constitution of 1946 divided Nigeria into three regions namely western, eastern and northern regions. West Cameroon (now Ambazonia) was now put under the administration of Eastern Region, which was dominated by the Igbo speaking ethnic group. Eastern Region of Nigeria and Southern Cameroons which later became Biafran and Ambazonian territories respectively were once one territory ruled from 1922 to 1961 by Britain. In the 1954 election between KNC (Kamerun National Congress) and KPP (Kamerun People's Party), Nnamdi Azikiwe and other politicians like K.O Mbadiwe, Mbonu Ojike and Igbo migrants in Cameroon

supported N.N Mbile and other KPP candidates. A good number of Igbo people were disenfranchised as their names disappeared from the voter registers. Shockingly, names of voters of French Cameroon extraction appeared in the voter registers.<sup>3</sup> French Cameroonians were ineligible to vote because they were not British subjects and were considered as aliens in West Cameroon by the British authorities. Endeley's KNC won twelve out of the thirteen seats in the Eastern Regional legislature. The Lagos Constitutional Conference of 1954 announced that based on the result, West Cameroon would be removed from Eastern Region to remain a quasi-federal territory. This was during the period that NCNC changed to National Council of Nigerian Citizens as the three associations from the Cameroons left National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. In the plebiscite of 11th February, 1961 in which West Cameroon was asked whether to join French Cameroon or Nigeria, Igbo politicians in Nigeria equally campaigned for West Cameroon to be part of Nigeria. Endeley who was initially in support for a reunification with French Cameroon changed camps and supported a union with Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> Anglophone Cameroon voted to join French Cameroon instead of Nigeria citing the domineering influence of the Igbo in West Cameroon. From the foregoing Cameroon and Nigeria, two neighbouring countries almost had similar colonial history. These two countries were colonised by European nations. Germany, Britain and France colonised Cameroon while Britain colonised Nigeria. The power play saw Cameroon being ruled by Britain and France following the defeat of Germany in the first world war. Germany was its first colonial ruler. The territory claimed by Biafra was located in Nigeria while that claimed by Ambazonia is located in Cameroon. These groups perceived that they were being sidelined in the scheme of things and opted to break away unsuccessfully from the sovereign state, Biafra from Nigeria in 1967 and Ambazonia from Cameroon in 2017.

Conflict theories like relative deprivation theory and Marxist theory provide useful frameworks in analysing the Biafran and Ambazonian agitations. The deprivation theory posits that conflict emerges when individuals or groups feel deprived of their rights and privileges.<sup>5</sup> The deprived person feels that he or she is entitled to rights and privileges enjoyed by others. The perceived injustice, rather than absolute poverty, triggers political action. In Cameroon, eight out of the ten regions are Francophone leading to Francophone dominance over the Anglophone section which is comprised of the remaining two regions. Marxism posits that society is moulded by class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.<sup>6</sup> The Anglophone section could be seen as the proletariat struggling to liberate themselves. The Francophone are the bourgeoisie controlling political power and resource control. This struggle by the Anglophones to free themselves from suppression by the Francophone made the Anglophone section to declare secession from the country. The Biafrans were defeated in the 1967-70 war and the war occurred because of the pogroms carried out by Northerners on the Igbo and suppression of the Igbo (Biafrans) continued after the war ended. Both Ambazonians and Biafrans were deprived of the rights and privileges enjoyed by other citizens of their countries.

In relation to the study, some works were consulted. J O Nwoke acknowledges Achebe's book titled *There was a country* with Nwoke identifying the country as Biafra formed in 1967 and lasted till 1970.<sup>7</sup> It could equally be argued that the country Achebe was referring to was Nigeria before independence when Nigerians saw themselves as one. Achebe affirms thus

*Nigeria was once a land of great hope and progress, a nation with immense resources at its disposal-natural resources, yes, but even more so, human resources. But the Biafran war changed the course of Nigeria. In my view it was a cataclysmic experience that changed the history of Africa*<sup>8</sup>

A O Madiebo narrates the political and military background of the country before the first coup d'état and the trajectory of the Biafran war.<sup>9</sup> A Ugwuja links the upsurge of small arms and light weapons in Igbo land after the war to the Nigeria-Biafra war fought between 1967 and 1970.<sup>10</sup> E Igwebuike and A D Akoh analyse four selected speeches of Nnamdi Kanu in 2018 in which he applies (de)legitimation to justify Biafra's agitation for independence.<sup>11</sup> H R Ngouo analyses Facebook discourse in which some Anglophones felt that seceding from Cameroon was unnecessary while others felt that secession was necessary. He also avers that Anglophone Cameroon was once being ruled from Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> E E Asukwo delves into the Anglophone Ambazonian crisis and its impact, noting that Cameroon and Nigeria were facing secessionist threats from Ambazonian separatists and Biafran agitators respectively. He captures the opinion of John Ngu Foncha who averred in 1986 that Anglophone Cameroonians were tagged Biafrans, enemies in the house, traitors etc.<sup>13</sup> C H Folefac and K C Ani dissect the impact of Ambazonian crisis on migration and nation building in Cameroon and neighbouring countries.<sup>14</sup> C F Chiagozie and P Yomo examine how Ambazonian activities have affected political development in Cameroon

and the implication of humanitarian and refugee crisis on Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> C P Musa discusses the Anglophone resentments against the Yaounde government leading to the secessionist crisis with the Yaounde government's denial of the Anglophone problem and the intimidation of Anglophone protesters through crackdown.<sup>16</sup> All these works are related to the agitation; however, none focuses on the similarities between the Biafra and Ambazonia agitation. This study will fill that gap.

Southern Cameroons and West Cameroon will be used interchangeably in this study. Between 1922 and 1961, Anglophone Cameroon was officially known as Southern Cameroons. From 1961 to 1972 it was known as West Cameroon. These two different nomenclatures will be used interchangeably. This study is structured into four sections namely introduction, background to the Ambazonian and Biafran agitations; similarities between the Ambazonian and Biafran agitations and conclusion.

### **Background to the Biafran and Ambazonian Agitations**

The origin of the word "Biafra" is traced to the Portuguese and other European travellers who referred to the area around the Niger Delta, Southern Cameroons, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea as Biafra, Biafara and Biafar. In 1731, Johann Heinrich Zedler placed Biafra below latitude 6°10' in his encyclopaedia. The Europeans referred to this coastline as Bight of Biafra.<sup>17</sup> On maps from the 18th century, the words Biafara and Biafares appeared around Senegal and Gambia. Rev Charles W Thomas placed the islands in the bight of Biafra between longitude 5° and 9° East and latitude 4°North and 2°South. Consequently, a section of the Gulf of Guinea was known as Bight of Biafra, which was later changed to Bight of Bonny by the federal government of Nigeria following the loss of the Nigeria-Biafra war by the Biafrans. It was Chief Frank Opigo, an Ijaw man from today's Bayelsa State a member of Eastern Constituent Assembly, that suggested to Dim Chukwuemeka Ojukwu that the breakaway nation should go by the name Biafra.<sup>18</sup> The Bight of Biafra is the "vast expanse of water covering the continental shelf into which the Niger empties before flowing into the Gulf of Guinea," says Chinua Achebe.<sup>19</sup> The Biafra area as declared by Ojukwu covered the then Eastern Region, which comprised of 20 provinces among which were Calabar, Aba, Owerri, Yenagoa and Enugu Province. The present states in the south south geopolitical zone: Akwa Ibom State, Rivers State, Cross River State and part of Delta State and the south east geopolitical zone constituted the Biafran Republic. The amalgamation of 1914 saw Britain bringing together the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The area that was later declared Biafra was located in the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The colonialist introduced divide and rule in the colony. In the 1922 Clifford Constitution the north was not part of the legislative assembly as the Governor used proclamations to govern the north. In 1946 the Richards Constitution delineated Nigeria into three regions: north, west and east. The north was larger than the size of east and west put together. The north almost broke away from Nigeria following the 1953 motion for self government in 1956 raised by Anthony Enahoro, which led to violence in Kano when members of Action Group went there to sensitise the people on the need for immediate self government for Nigeria.<sup>20</sup> Following the independence of Nigeria in 1960, a northerner in the person of Tafawa Balewa became the Prime Minister.

As a result of the huge corruption perpetuated by the civilians, the military through young army officers struck on 15th January 1966 leading to the death of top Nigerian politicians. This coup was erroneously tagged an Igbo coup. There was the Araba riot against southerners in Kaduna, Kano, Zaria, Sokoto and Jos on 29th May, 1966, in which northerners clamoured for secession.<sup>21</sup> There was a counter coup by the northerners in July 1966 in which General Aguiyi Ironsi was killed with the arrowhead being Yakubu Gowon, a Middle Belter. The Igbo were killed in huge numbers in the north and even in Lagos, compelling a lot of them to surge homeward to the east as the federal government, under the helm of affairs of Gowon could not stop the pogroms against the Igbo. This reason and others like Gowon not abiding to the 1967 Aburi Accord, seniority clash between Gowon and Odimegwu Ojukwu among others resulted in the Nigeria-Biafra war. In the post bellum Nigeria, the Igbo are being marginalised because of their loss in that war.

The name Ambazonia is derived from the Amba Bay in Limbe. *Ambozes* is the local name for the bay which appears at the mouth of the Wouri River. In the 15th century, the Portuguese referred to the area where the Bay was located as *Tierra Alta de Ambozes* meaning Highland of Ambozes.<sup>22</sup> A settlement of liberated slaves was set up by Alfred Saker, a Baptist missionary in 1858 by the Amba Bay. Saker was among the Protestant missionaries that arrived Fernando Po in 1844 and set up a missionary station, but was driven from there by the Spaniards in 1858 forcing him to establish a permanent station in Victoria. The language of communication here became English. Amba Bay later became known as Victoria, which was changed to Limbe in 1982 by President Amadou Ahidjo. In 1884, the area was known as the British Amba Bay Protectorate, with its capital being

Victoria. In 1887, this area was ceded by Britain to Germany in exchange of Saint Lucia in South Africa.<sup>23</sup> It was Fon Gorji Dinka, the President of Cameroon Bar Association that coined the name 'Ambazonia' from *Ambozes* in 1984 to restore the region's autonomy and preserve its institution. The Amba Bay serves as a demarcation between Nigeria and La République du Cameroun. Behind the Amba Bay are the hinterlands, hence the name Ambazonia. This implies that Ambazonia refers to the zone around the back of the Amba Bay. Another name for Ambazonia is Ambaland. The Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) that became prominent around 1995 was instrumental to the declaration of Southern Cameroons as Federal Republic of Ambazonia.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1884/85 and 1914, Germany ruled Kamerun as a colony. By 1916, Cameroon was split between France and Britain following the victory of the allied powers in the First World War. By 1946, the Anglophone section was administered as part of Eastern Region of Nigeria by Britain. On 11th February, 1961, a plebiscite was organised by United Nations Organisation in which British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons were given the option to join French Cameroon alias La République or Nigeria. It is said that there was a suppressed third option suggested by Cameroonians, which was for West Cameroon to be granted independence. British Northern Cameroons which today comprises Adamawa and Taraba states, joined Nigeria while British Southern Cameroons (today's North West and South West Regions) joined French Cameroon. On 1st October 1961, La République and West Cameroon came together to be known as Federal Republic of Cameroon, operating a federal constitution. The Cameroonian flag of green, red, yellow had two stars, one representing East Cameroon and the other, West Cameroon. In 1972, the nomenclature was changed to United Republic of Cameroon under President Amadou Ahidjo. In 1982, the "United" was expunged from the name under the government of Paul Biya leaving "Republic of Cameroon". This new name as argued in some quarters made Anglophone Cameroon to lose its cultural identity. This was seen as a form of assimilation by *La République* by some observers who regarded French Cameroon as practising and perfecting the art of assimilation bequeathed to it by France. West Cameroonians (made up of only two provinces) were suppressed by French Cameroon, which was made up of eight provinces.

**Map of Nigeria and Cameroon showing Biafra and Ambazonia**



**Note:**

The Igbo heartland, the area between English Cameroon and Igbo heartland, and area directly underneath Igbo heartland constituted Biafra while Cameroon's English Speaking Regions constitute Ambazonia

Source: Amand Mouko Boudombo, "Why separatists in Cameroon and Nigeria have united", 21st November, 2021, accessed 12th November, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58726231>

**Similarities between the Biafran and Ambazonian Agitations**

**Marginalisation:** The agitation for a state of Biafra by Nnamdi Kanu and the declaration of Ambazonia by Southern Cameroonians was sparked off by marginalisation of government at the centre. The declaration of a State of Biafra by Lieutenant Colonel Odimegwu Ojukwu was mainly due to Igbo pogroms that lasted in the

north from the end of July to September 1966. Other reasons were argument over superiority of rank between Ojukwu and Gowon, non-implementation of the Aburi accord etc. From 1970 till 2022, the Igbo in Nigeria had been marginalised. After the Nigeria - Biafra war, 20 pounds was given to Igbo bank depositors no matter their bank deposit before the war. Some even got lesser. Also was the abandoned property saga in Rivers State, as properties owned by the Igbo were confiscated by the Rivers State government in collaboration with the federal government of Gowon, and declared as abandoned property. In post bellum Nigeria, it had been difficult for an Igbo to become the President of the country as if there was a tacit agreement by the Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba to ensure that no Igbo headed that position. Security agencies like the Custom, Police, Immigration, Civil Defence etc were rarely headed by the Igbo. The office of the national adviser, chief of staff, chief of air force, chief of naval staff were rarely manned by the Igbo. The South East geopolitical zone was the only zone with five states while the other five zones had six and seven states. Wherever there was crisis in the North even if not caused by an Igbo, the Igbo were always the major victim. Due to various shades of marginalisation, a protest group emerged in 1999 known as Movement for the Actualisation of a Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), probably coined after the popular Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Ralph Uwazuruoke was the leader of MASSOB. A splinter group emerged known as Biafra Zionist Movement in 2010. MASSOB was conservative and it was alleged that it collected bribe from the federal government. This led to the emergence of IPOB under Nnamdi Kanu in 2012, which was radical. Another faction split from IPOB under Norway based Simon Ekpa. For the Anglophone Cameroonians, none of them had been the President of the country. The heads of the security agencies as well as directors in the ministries were being occupied by the Francophone Cameroonians. The airport in Tiko and seaport in Limbe and Tiko were not being developed to full capacity as attention was focused on the Yaounde Airport and Douala Seaport. The Tiko Airport and Seaport were functional in the 1970s; however, observations in the 1980s on different occasions indicated the infrastructure was in a dilapidated condition. Anglophones did lament of lack of employment for the Anglophones. In 2016 there were protests in Southern Cameroons, following the posting of Francophone judges to Southern Cameroons where common law was obtained while they (the judges) were grounded in civil law.<sup>25</sup> This implies these judges would use French to run court proceedings. French teachers were equally posted to the Anglophone section where language for instruction was English. Some official documents were written only in French without an English version and some were poorly translated as English was looked down upon by government. University of Yaounde established in 1962 was the first university and was supposed to be a bilingual university, but turned out to focus more on French. This turned out to be a disservice for students from the Anglophone section. It was not until 1993 that the Anglophone section had its first university in University of Buea. In 2011 the second public university was established in Bamenda (University of Bamenda).<sup>26</sup> Between 1962 and 1993, a lot of Anglophone Cameroonians who sought for higher education came over to Nigeria for it due to the language barrier associated with University of Yaounde.

**Sit-at-home:** The two separatist groups, (IPOB and Ambazonian separatists) embarked on a sit-at-home protest to show their displeasure with the government. Sit-at-home was a form of civil disobedience against the government of the day. Sit-at-home protest in Biafra land kicked off in earnest in 2021 on Mondays.<sup>27</sup> As a form of civil disobedience, schools, offices, public transportation, markets and other business premises were directed by IPOB to remain close and also on any day Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was to be tried in court. Also, sit-at-home was declared on 30th May to commemorate the declaration of Republic of Biafra and to revere the fallen heroes during the *bellum civile*. Violators of this directive and innocent citizens were attacked and some were allegedly killed by IPOB apologists. Some schools directed students to come to school on Saturdays to make for the lost day (Monday). On Monday, 14th September 2021, armed IPOB apologists allegedly chased away students of Comprehensive Secondary School, Nkume in Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State that were about taking English Language in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations.<sup>28</sup> The alleged presence of armed IPOB apologists was felt around Okwudor-Nkume-Atta-Umuntanze axis in Imo State. Indigenes of these communities living outside this area rarely visited their country home because of the activities of IPOB. On 20th June 2022, armed IPOB apologists allegedly attacked the Izombe market and set public transport vehicles ablaze in the Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State to enforce the sit-at-home order.<sup>29</sup> There are arguments that this violence was perpetuated by criminals sponsored by the Nigerian government and not IPOB. The Ambazonian separatists began the sit-at-home protest on Mondays before IPOB, which was known in local parlance in Ambazonia as *Country Sunday*. Sundays are normally days of rest and for worship by Christians. These Mondays were treated like Sundays. Businesses, markets, schools and public places were shut on this day and any other day declared by these groups. In Ambazonia, whenever there was sit-at-home it was strictly adhered to due to fears that violators would face serious consequences. This researcher travelled to West

Cameroon through Abakaliki to Ikom, passed through Mfum in Cross River State in Nigeria. He got stuck at Ekok in South West Region in Cameroon on a Monday in 2021 due to the sit-at-home. One of the drivers plying the Kumba-Mamfe-Ekok road narrated his experience how he disobeyed the sit-at-home on a Monday in 2021. He was abducted along the route and taken into the forest for some days and was warned never to drive along the route on *Country Sunday*.<sup>30</sup> CDC (Cameroon Development Corporation) workers who didn't pay heed to the sit-at-home directive had some of their fingers chopped off for working on the CDC plantation.<sup>31</sup> On 20th May 2021, a sit-at-home was declared by Ambazonian separatists in which the Ambazonian borders were to be closed and also urged Ambazonians to observe sit-at-home across Biafra land on 31st May, 2021.<sup>32</sup> The declaration was to stall the celebration of the National Day celebrated every 20th May to commemorate reunification of West Cameroon and East Cameroon on 20th May, 1972. On this day the Federal Republic of Cameroon became United Republic of Cameroon. The Ambazonians saw this day as a day that the Yaounde government obliterated federalism and compelling them to embrace unitary system of government. From that day the Anglophone section lost its autonomy following the centralisation of power.

**Refugee/ Internally Displaced Person Challenges:** Both conflicts resulted in a large number of refugees. Whenever a town fell during the Biafra conflict of 1967-70, people moved to other areas yet to be under siege. Towns like Owerri, Aba, Onitsha, Port Harcourt fell to the Nigerian forces. Some communities that accommodated refugees were Okwudor, Umuowa and its environs in old Orlu Division. The Red Cross and Oxfam supplied food to the refugees. Some of these refugees ended up as wives and husbands of indigenes of the host communities. These were internal refugees as there were also external refugees who left Biafra for countries like Gabon, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Today, the term IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) has replaced the term for internal refugees while a country's refugees outside its shores are simply known as refugees.<sup>33</sup> The Red Cross in Cameroon provided skills and jobs for some Biafran refugees. The militant arm of IPOB, ESN (Eastern Security Network) was set up to chase away Fulani Jihadists in the forests in Igbo land. Some parts of Igbo land like Ihiala, Umutanze, Orsu among others became uninhabitable as the indigenes left their ancestral land due to attacks by unknown gunmen who claimed to be fighting for the restoration of Biafra. Attribution for this incident remains disputed as accusations directed at the ESN have been refuted. These indigenes running to other towns are referred to as IDPs. Ambazonian refugees from the turmoil in North West and South West could be found in Nigerian neighbouring communities and states bordering Cameroon. These refugees were found in Ogoja, Boki, Etung and Obanliku Local Government Areas of Cross River State; in Konshisha, Kwande and Vandeikya Local Government Areas of Benue State and in Ussa, Takum, Donga, Wukari and Sardauna Local Government Areas of Taraba State.<sup>34</sup> According to UNHCR on 28th January, 2018, about ten thousand Cameroonian refugees were camped in Calabar Municipal in Cross River State. 80% of these refugees were women and children.<sup>35</sup> International organisations and the Nigerian government supported the refugees.

**Conflict zone:** Both Biafra land and Ambazonia were the epicentre of the conflict as areas outside these areas scarcely suffered death toll and infrastructure losses. In 1967-70 the Biafran war was fought as civilians were conscripted into the Biafran Army. These poorly and quickly trained soldiers faced the sophisticated, motivated and highly trained Nigerian troops who were adequately armed. Fighting took place in Aba, Owerri, Port Harcourt etc in Biafra land. The ingenuity of the Biafrans like Gordian Ezekwe, Benjamin Nwosu, Willy Chukwe among others led to the production of ogbunigwe (mass killers).<sup>36</sup> Palm oil was processed to power aircraft. The facilitator of this remarkable invention was Dr Felix Oragwu who headed the RAP (Research and Production) team. Biafran soldiers were poorly clothed as there was shortage of uniforms. Kanu's demand for Biafra following the formation of IPOB saw him advocating for IPOB members and Biafrans to attack police stations and security personnel. ESN had from time to time exchanged gunfire with the country's security personnel. The IPOB faction, Autopilot led by Simon Ekpa was also involved in this attack. The IPOB foot soldiers were referred to as Unknown Gunmen (UGM) by certain segments of society. The Correctional Centre in Owerri was attacked by UGM and inmates set free.<sup>37</sup> ESN was supposed to flush out the Fulani herders turned jihadist in the forests in Igbo land were instead allegedly kidnapping, maiming and killing Biafrans in their homeland. Some have said that the perpetrators of this act were not truly ESN but criminals capitalising on the quicksand in Biafra. These killer herdsmen were having a field day in the forest. There were various attacks between Ambazonian separatists and Cameroonian security apparatus. From 2017 till 2022, the separatists were involved in exchange of gunfire with Cameroonian security agencies like the gendarme, army and police in towns in North West and South West Region. Towns worst hit were Buea, Bamenda and environs. Offices of the Divisional Officer, Senior Divisional Officer and buildings of security agencies were attacked by protesters as the Cameroon flags were torn. There

were clashes in 2019 and 2020 between the Fulani locally known as Mbororos and Anglophone Cameroonians in North West Region over land use.<sup>38</sup>

**Alliance, communication channels and funding:** The faction of Ambazonia led by Sisuku Julius Ayuk Tabe partnered with Nnamdi Kanu's IPOB. There was a protest held in London in which the two groups took part appealing to the British government to intervene in the misgovernance going on in their countries and called for referendum in Nigeria and Cameroon. The Monday sit-at-home was carried out in Ambaland and Biafra land as earlier stated in this study. In 2021 the separatist group, Ambazonia Defence Forces announced its collaboration with IPOB. Cho Ayaba, leader of the Ambazonian Governing Council and Nnamdi Kanu agreed to ensure that the common border between Ambazonia and Biafra was safe; and open exchange of arms, information and personnel. Some weapons used in Ambazonia were believed to have been smuggled from Nigeria through Biafra land.<sup>39</sup> The means of disseminating information was through radio channels and social media. Ambazonian separatists made use of social media channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, X and other platforms. Southern Cameroons Broadcasting Corporation (SCBC), Africa Broadcasting Service (ABS) and ABC Amber Television, Ambazonian Communication Network could be found on social media handles and traditional media. IPOB communicated to the world through Biafra Tv, Radio Biafra on social media handles and also on traditional media. The life wire of any functional organisation is finance. The secessionist groups needed funds to execute their operation which was mainly obtained from Biafrans and Ambazonians in diaspora.

**Name calling:** Muhammadu Buhari, the President of Nigeria in 2021 referred to IPOB as "a dot in a circle". He stated that the government would "talk to them in the language they would understand". This statement drew significant criticism and was deleted by X (formerly Twitter) for violating its rules regarding references to the 1967–1970 Nigeria-Biafra war issues.<sup>40</sup> This outburst by Buhari was viewed by many people as hypocritical as the president never showed equal resentment towards the mayhem caused by Boko Haram. The "dot in a circle" metaphor implied that IPOB was so small that it could be easily overrun and wiped out by the Nigerian security forces that had encircled them. The federal government had earlier in 2017 proscribed the activities of IPOB and declared it a terrorist organisation. In 2017, Benard Okalia, the then Governor of the South West Region, referred to Anglophone protesters as "dogs". The other tags placed on them were "terrorists", "secessionists", "two cubes of sugar in a basin of water" and a "toothless bulldog".<sup>41</sup> The "dogs" analogy implied they were mindlessly destructive, moving about and destroying state infrastructure with reckless abandon. As "dogs," they might be suffering from rabies. The perceived "only way" to cure this "rabies" was to terminate the lives of these individuals, a task the security agencies allegedly carried out with deadly precision. Consequently, many Ambazonians were killed. Another response to this quagmire was the mass arrest of the protesters. Referring to them as "dogs" was a strategy to strip them of their human rights; as animals, they could be killed without paying heed to human rights laws. This was a strategy to exploit the fact that animals in Cameroon did not effectively have legal rights. Even if they had possessed rights, these rights were suppressed in practice. They were referred to as "terrorists" because of the protest against the government. They were called "secessionists" following the declaration of an independent Republic of Ambazonia. The "two cubes of sugar in a basin of water" metaphor meant they were insignificant because of their small population that could be easily subsumed by the rest of the country. Cameroon is comprised of ten regions with Ambazonia, comprising just two regions. For this reason they were tagged a "toothless bulldog" who could just bark but not bite. This implied that every protest by the Ambazonians was of no effect.

**Arrest of Kanu and Ayuk:** Kanu was arrested in Nigeria in 2015 and later jumped bail due to an attempt to assassinate him in 2017, but was later abducted from Kenya and brought to Nigeria in 2021. Initially, there were 15 count charge which included treason and terrorism against him with 8 being quashed in the court remaining 7 all bordering on terrorism. Among the 7 count charge were: issuing a threat in relation to sit-at-home, inciting members of the public to attack security personnel between 2018 and 2021, directing IPOB members to make bombs, concealing Tram 50L a radio transmitter in a container.<sup>42</sup> Ayuk of the Southern Cameroons National Council and nine of his followers were arrested in Nigeria and extradited to Cameroon in January 2018. They were sentenced for life in 2019 for charges including terrorism and secession and given a huge fine to pay.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

This study argues that political and economic marginalisation constitute the primary triggers of the Biafran and Ambazonian agitations. The research identifies and analyses similarities between the two movements using the following variables: marginalisation, sit-at-home, refugee/IDP challenges, conflict zone, name-calling and

stigmatisation, alliance formation and the arrests of Nnamdi Kanu and Ayuk Tabe. The differences between the two agitations--particularly in terms of geographical location, ethnic composition and levels of international support--are acknowledged but reserved for discussion in a separate study. Relative deprivation and Marxist theories were employed to explain the underlying causes of the agitations, as reflected in the identified similarities. The findings suggest that perceived exclusion from political power and economic opportunities has fueled grievances that manifest in separatist mobilisation in both contexts. This study recommends stronger collaboration between the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon in managing separatist activities, especially given the shared border between Biafran and Ambazonian regions, which facilitates cross-border interactions, attacks, and the exchange of ideas. Since the agitators primarily protest against marginalisation, both governments should implement inclusive policies that promote equitable political participation and economic development for all citizens. Such measures would enhance national integration and nation-building efforts. Should these interventions fail, the study further recommends the organisation of a referendum to determine the extent of popular support for secession among the marginalised groups. In such a case, the United Nations or African Union could be invited to oversee the process. These organisations could also consider proposing an international legal framework mandating referenda in situations where prolonged conflicts arise from systemic marginalisation.

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